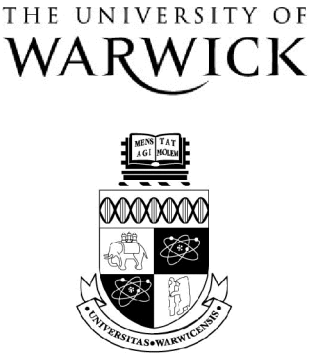

Allegory in *Joseph and Aseneth*: Three Studies of Narrative and Exegesis

by

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A Thesis submitted for the Degree of

PhD in Classics

Department of Classics and Ancient History

July 2011

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Acknowledgements

I should like to say that the present thesis would have never been completed without the exceptional support I have received from the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Warwick. Indeed, over the years my colleagues have given me plenty of valuable advice as well as the gift of long-lasting friendships. With his patience, humanity and trust that I could do this work, my supervisor has given me invaluable guidance. Overall, what I have received from everyone I have met in several Classics-related occasions is unforgettable.

E. M.

Table of Contents

Abstract

The present work considers the novel of Joseph and Aseneth (*J & A*) as an allegorical text which was transmitted in various cultural environments, potentially from the poly-cultural background of Hellenistic Judaism to the time of the novel's extant manuscripts in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. While positing that *J & A* was conceived as a versatile text around the time of the rise of the ancient Greek novel, the thesis highlights the sophisticated literary features of this religious text. In fact, the imagery of *J & A* is loaded with further significance, touching upon mystical themes which can be compared with pagan testimonies of arcane lore and mysteries. Moreover, typical scenes in *J & A* are devised by means of complex rhetorical strategies, which contributed to the addition of further senses to the story. Indeed, the allegorical discourse which can be detected in *J & A* conferred to the novel a plain narrative surface, while leaving a deeper significance for its readers and interpreters to decode. In this respect, *J & A* is brought closer to Classical texts such as the ancient novels and Homeric literature, because its narrative allowed subsequent interpretations and even adaptations of the story in different cultural and religious contexts. While points of contact between *J & A* and pagan, Jewish and Christian allegorical texts may be only suggestive, the present analysis hopes to envisions a few proposals for the early purpose and aftermath of *J & A* from its hypothetical original milieu in Hellenistic Judaism to the end of Antiquity.

Preface

Finding a secure position in ancient novelistic literature for the novel of Joseph and Aseneth (*J & A*) is a hard task. Its apparently naïve use of conventional themes and motifs of the Hellenistic romance has made scholars infer that *J & A* was a Jewish-Hellenistic response to the rise of the pagan novel. On the other hand most recent scholarship has endeavoured to assess Aseneth's story in its own right. Sophisticated analyses of *J & A* have envisioned a tradition which developed independently as a Jewish novel drawn from the Septuagint.[1] These scholarly perspectives address crucial points for the study of Hellenistic literary milieus and the place of intellectual Jews in the culture of their time. Given its complex textual tradition, students of *J & A* have combined the discussion of philological questions about the genesis of the text with literary-historical analyses of its different audiences. In response to the multi-disciplinary scholarly background of work on *J & A*, I follow these more sophisticated engagements with literary-historical contexts.

The language of *J & A* is κοινή Greek, and its vocabulary is consistent with the Septuagint and the later Jewish versions of Scripture, as well as with the New Testament. The relation of *J & A* to the Septuagint suggests a Jewish-Hellenistic composition of the novel, while confirming its later reception in Christian environments. The date of the translation of the Septuagint in the mid-third and second centuries B.C. does not offer a proper chronological term, because *J & A* might have arisen so early as an oral tradition, which presumably run parallel with the long genesis of the novel as a literary form. Nevertheless in absolute terms the Septuagint marks a beginning of our story. Gideon Bohak[2] has in fact argued for a very early origin of *J & A*, suggesting that it was a *roman à clef* in which characters represent historical personages. In his interpretation, *J & A* is an allegory of political events such as rivalries between priestly families in Jerusalem which were the premises for the building of the Jewish Temple in Leontopolis during the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (186-145 B.C.). Although Bohak's methodology is coherent

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[1] See Bohak (1996), Braginskaya (2005-2007) and for suggestions about *J & A* as an example or 'rewritten Bible' rather than a novel, Docherty (2004).
[2] Bohak (1993), (1996).

and his explanation of *J & A* fascinating, it seems more likely that the novel in its extant state was a Jewish response to the novelistic genre, which crystallized in the late Hellenistic period. The extant manuscript evidence of the Greek texts of *J & A* points to its later Christian reception and transmission from the tenth to the seventeenth centuries. The Syriac version[3] of *J & A*, which dates at the end of the sixth century, constitutes our *terminus ante quem* for the composition of a lost Greek original of Aseneth's tradition, and can be treated as the first extant re-elaboration of the novel in Christian perspective. In much the same way, the association of *J & A* with narratives about Joseph's life in Christian manuscripts, as Burchard has pointed out, testifies to the reading of the novel as an edifying biographical tale from early Christianity and throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.[4] Indeed, if we used the extant witnesses of *J & A* as 'a more secure basis'[5] for its study, we might consider Aseneth's romance as the last rather than the earliest novel in the history of the genre in antiquity, perhaps an adaptation of the Hellenistic novel which became popular as an edifying Christian narrative in the Churches of the East.[6]

However, *J & A* is most sensibly viewed as a testimony to Jewish narrative and exegesis of the first centuries of the Common Era. It contains the old 'building blocks' of the Hellenistic romance, thus indicating a complex use of sources and literary genres on the anonymous author's part. It is therefore still feasible to justify the origins and development of *J & A* as contemporary to the Hellenistic romance that is, from the first to the third-fourth centuries A.D. The approach of this thesis is to explore various literary-religious contexts which may have prompted the rise, circulation and preservation of *J & A* in this long span of time and with a glance at later Christian re-interpretations of the ancient novel. Indeed, the philosophical-ethical ideology contained in the pagan novels, which highlight the virtues of chaste love and of private, family interests within a social context was likely to be well

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[3] The Syriac version of *J & A* is incorporated in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* by Zachariah Rhetor, a world-chronicle that was meant to be a continuation from the history of the Church by Socrates and Theodoret, and was accomplished after 568-569 A.D. Zachariah, the author, is only known as a monophysite and monk, who wrote perhaps in Amida (Diyarbakir).

[4] In fact, in part of the Greek and Modern Greek traditions and in the Armenian version *J & A* appears after a homily 'on the beautiful Joseph', which goes under the name of Ephrem the Syrian (306-377 A.D.). See Burchard (2003) and Fink (2008).

[5] See Inowlocki (2006).

[6] For the reception of *J & A* in the East, see e.g. Burchard (2008).

received in intellectual Jewish circles during Hellenism and the Roman Empire. Interestingly, the blending of Jewish and Hellenistic ideologies seems to be reflected in the literary form of *J & A*.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. After an introductory overview of the novelistic genre, in Chapter 1 I highlight parallels between *J & A* and narrative-allegorical writings of the first-second centuries A.D. rather than the pagan romances. In so doing, I aim to argue that *J & A* merges conventional motifs of the Hellenistic romance with the re-elaborated biblical narrative, thus resulting in a religious text devised in entertaining mode. As for its significance, the ideology of the Hellenistic pagan romance was appropriated in *J & A*, to the point that it was utterly transformed in an original literary work. Novelistic motifs are re-proposed, whereas the change in their significance indicates the different ethical-religious outlook in *J & A*. Thus, mutual love between two extraordinary characters passes from being an ethical value in the Hellenistic family and society to represent the worthiness of an Egyptian mother of Israel. Blissful love and happiness in marriage are inscribed in the universal divine plan, as *J & A* purports to illustrate in digressive rhetorical speeches. Similarly, a novelistic motif such as love at first sight triggers in Aseneth the faith in the God of Israel, prompting her change of heart which is progressively verbalized in the monologues and prayers of her ritual confession.

In Hellenistic Judaism *J & A* might have been read as the proselyte's path towards the faith in Israel's God. The protagonist in the transmission and reception of *J & A* is the rhetorical figure of allegory. In fact, if applied to the reading of a text, allegory allows subsequent readers to detect further senses underlying the surface of what is plainly stated. An allegorical approach in ancient contexts presupposes the notion of a literal sense enshrining profound philosophical and religious significance in the text explored. As an allegorical story celebrating Judaism in a Hellenistic context, *J & A* can be compared to narrative traditions about the translation of the Hebrew scrolls into Greek. The earliest narrative retelling the historical translation is the *Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates* which is dated around the first century A.D. The fictional account of the translation in epistolary form is set in Ptolemaic Egypt, in the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Points of contact between *J & A* and the *Letter* may be seen in the allegorical methodology which discloses the purpose of celebrating

Jewish lore. In fact, the *Letter* portrays Jewish religious-ethical values in philosophical terms and through the literary device of the philosophical discussion. In *J & A*, religious-theoretical concepts are similarly contained in the characters' rhetorical monologues, albeit in the form of prayers to the God of Israel and in the divine announcement of a 'man from heaven' to Aseneth. Thus, *J & A* can be defined as allegorical also because Aseneth's story may have become a universal ethical model in Jewish environments.

The unique literary form of *J & A* allows us to consider the Hellenistic-Jewish novel as a commentary on Scripture which was written as a narrative and therefore as a case of 're-written' Bible. In fact, the biblical quotations from *Genesis* in the novel make it similar to a commentary on the elliptic scriptural verses. Thus contemporary Jewish values are conveyed through the form of a novelistic expansion on a patriarchal tradition. The underlying complexity of *J & A* is belied by means of allegory, which is one of the key focusses of the present study. With its prerogative to allow an author 'to say something else', while concealing the real sense of the words used shrewdly, allegory is the ideal figure of speech to create a significant picture of contemporary religious-cultural ideologies. A learned Jew of the first century A.D., Philo of Alexandria, has left to subsequent readers a conspicuous amount of writing in which allegory is applied to the interpretation of biblical episodes as well as to contemporary events.

If we consider allegory as a point of contact, it is fruitful to analyse *J & A* in comparison with Philo of Alexandria's treatises. Indeed, by means of allegory Philo presents complex allegorical readings of Scripture as well as of contemporary events. Similarly in *J & A* the picture of respectful relations between the Hebrew and the Egyptian characters may illustrate an ideal world in the age of the patriarchs as a model for contemporary readers, thus offering an actualizing interpretation of Scripture. Philo's sharp analysis of a time which saw contacts and political-cultural clashes between Hellenistic Jewish communities and the Romans is carried out through his programmatic use of figurative imagery. In a way similar to *J & A*, Philo's allegory portrays ideal religious-philosophical tenets in a time of conflict with ethnic groups such as the Egyptians and the Roman rule. In the patriarchs' lives, Philo distinguishes between the historical and the allegorical senses of Scripture, thus

exposing the significance of the Hebrew ancestors' deeds beyond the literal sense. In his perspective, allegory is not timeless, but it may be fixed in particular conditions, as well as relevant to the Jewish nation and its lore.

In this connection, Philo's portrayal of Joseph represents the ideal ruler according to Jewish-Hellenistic ethical terms in the hero's *Life*. Against this portrayal, in the treatise *On Dreams* Joseph becomes the emblem of conceit and vainglory, thus being associated with Egypt as the land of material needs as it is interpreted in Philo's speculation. The historical treatises on *Flaccus*, Roman prefect in Egypt, and the *Embassy to Gaius*, which is an elaborated, rhetorical account of the Jewish delegation to the Roman Emperor Caligula in 38 A.D., indicate that Philo conceived of allegorical interpretation as an intellectual practice with direct contemporary relevance. This literary comparison highlights Philo's ideology of Jewish ethics as the true interpretation of Hellenistic values. The biblical past, apparently remote, is actualized in the exemplary stories of the patriarchs represented as philosophers and wise rulers. Joseph in particular adds further aspects to the glorious past of Israel. As a controversial forefather, he seems to embody the difficult position of Jews in Philo's time, whereas as a successful and uncommonly wise ruler in Egypt Joseph becomes the tutelary patriarch for Jews of the Diaspora, representing hope, endurance and victory in the alien land of Egypt thanks to unsurpassed ethical-religious principles. In the novel, the praise of Joseph's wisdom seems to indicate an analogous perspective in Hellenistic Judaism.

As an allegorical commentary on Scripture, *J & A* can be compared with Hellenistic texts of Homeric revisionism, such as Heraclitus the Allegorist's *Homeric Problems*. Chapter 1 ends with a concise study of Heraclitus the grammarian, which remarks ideological and thematic points of contact with the novel of *J & A*. Indeed, both Heraclitus the commentator of Homer and the author of *J & A* posited that the texts they were well familiar with, respectively the Homeric poems and the Septuagint, constituted authoritative sources of profound philosophical-religious senses which had to be detected and revealed. Although the strategies used in the novel and in the treatise of Homeric criticism are different, because *J & A* expresses its ideology in narrative mode, whereas Heraclitus inserts an authorial voice to

comment on problematic Homeric passages, both texts contain notions of mysticism and the hallowed revelation of the truth.

While developing suggestions about these motifs, Chapter 2 starts with a focus on episodes of mystical announcement in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and Jewish narratives which seem to contain points of contact with *J & A*. I shall next analyse Late Antique alchemical treatises, which represent the technique of metal transformation not only as a magical art, but also as a mystical union. In *J & A*, the embrace of the protagonists reunited after Aseneth's ritual confession is compared to an exchange of their spirit, which is called πνεῦμα like the substance which triggers off transformation of matter in pure gold in alchemical tracts. *J & A* is thus characterized by mystical elements which could be inherited in various religious contexts and intellectual systems. Further parallels with the novel's imagery and the religious-mystical significance embedded into it can be seen in the Gnostic Nag Hammadi writing known as *Apocryphon of John.* The text purports to recount the true story of the creation of the world, introducing mythical characters such as the first spirits which operated in the cosmos at the beginning of time. The symbolic opposition between darkness and light, death and life, deceit and truth in *J & A* might be read in Gnostic perspective as the conception of a dualism in reality from time immemorial. In the first centuries of Christianity, when various communities and Churches were shaping their notions of orthodoxy, *J & A* might represent a text at the borderline of religious systems and beliefs, a narrative which was preserved thanks to its versatility and plurality of senses. In order to illustrate the poly-semantic nature of *J & A*, which is devised through the allegorical technique employed, I shall conclude the analysis of mystical-enigmatic texts with a concise treatment of the *Tabula Cebetis*, a pagan philosophical dialogue purporting to exemplify the pattern and sense of human life.

Although no testimonies about the *J & A* tradition are extant in the Church Fathers, it is productive to consider allegorical readings of Scripture by them in order to understand better the reception of *J & A* in early Christianity. Indeed, earlier versions of the Jewish-Hellenistic *J & A* may have been expanded with additions of significant details and narrative elements at the hands of Christian copyists, working as commentators on the text with the aim of bringing out its deeper senses. Thus,

later Christian scribes may have added to the original *J & A* significant elements borrowed from the *Song of Songs* as well as other scriptural passages, as Ross Shepard Kraemer has argued.[7] However, by positing purposeful additions we are necessarily moving in a hypothetical terrain, whereas the only safe assumption is that variant forms of the novel of *J & A* circulated in Christianity as the outcome of a popular tradition, perhaps partly conveyed orally. It is noteworthy, however, that the allegorical features of *J & A* make the novel a complex text, able to communicate a sophisticated religious message tracking down between different intellectual systems. By exploring parallels between the novel and Origen's allegorical commentary on *The Song of Songs* it is possible to define *J & A* as an allegorical commentary on Scripture, which is devised as a fiction dense with profound senses.

The literary analysis of pagan, Jewish and Christian texts in the present work aims to propose a view of Hellenism and Early Christianity from various angles, taking into consideration literary-ideological relations between cultural systems. As I argue in Chapter 3, rhetorical figures such as allegory made possible the expression of philosophical and religious tenets from Hellenism to Late Antiquity and the first centuries of Christianity. In fact, Philostratus' dialogue *Heroikos* celebrates the mythical past of the Homeric epics, which are treated as a metaphor for Classical Greece. Philostratus invents a hallowed space in the Thracian Chersonese where time seems suspended and men can live in harmony with nature and divine beings. In much the same way, the setting of *J & A* in the symbolic, sacred courtyard within the walls of Heliopolis represents the value of the biblical time, which is expressed in symbolic numbers as well as universalised in the significant dimension of αἰών, the 'eternity' or 'fullness' of time.

As Hellenistic authors codified it, allegory is the rhetorical figure that allows one to conceal the profound sense of words, protecting the truth from laymen while ackowledging that wise readers will have the ability to decode it under the surface of the literal sense. The notion of a concealed truth can be related to the concept of the authorial 'silence', a device which most skilled authors such as Homer applied to their works. Dio of Prusa's *Oration 61* on *Chryseïs* or the Homeric silence exposes in

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[7] Kraemer (1998).

dialogical form the intellectual value of the authorial reticence. The motif of silence in *J & A* recurs as the ineffability of mysteries and divine names, while Aseneth does not dare to deliver her prayers aloud until her confession to God is almost accomplished. The mystical-religious interpretation of silence in *J & A* may testify to the Jewish-Hellenistic reading of the rhetorical device. By way of comparison, Philo of Alexandria in his exegesis of Scripture distinguishes between the hallowed voice (λόγος) of the oracles and the silence which the uninitiated will respect out of awe.

Approaching the end of antiquity, I also explore works by intellectuals who were exposed to the Christian outlook. It is feasible to recognise in *J & A* later religious sensibilities and a complex philosophical worldview. As Ross S. Kraemer has argued in her monograph about Aseneth's romance, points of contact between *J & A* and the Neoplatonic philosophers Plotinus and Porphyry may confirm the composition/development of the novel in the third-fourth century A.D. It seems particularly useful to the purposes of the present work to analyse images and symbols of *J & A* in comparison with Porphyry's allegorical commentary on *The Cave of the Nymphs*. In the literary milieu of the composition and reception of *J & A*, imagery emblematic of philosophical-theological senses was shared through pagan and Judeo-Christian texts. In *J & A*, Homeric imagery is sketched as a possible reminiscence of Classical literature, whereas philosophical concepts such as the overcoming of passions and the wise change of heart are expressed through hints at the Hellenic philosophical heritage, which was appropriated in the Greek romance as well as in the Jewish-Christian tradition of *J & A*.

The present study of allegory in *J & A* and fictions of various provenance ends with a glance at Philip the Philosopher's allegorical interpretation of Heliodorus' novel in the early twelfth century. Philip's reading of *Theagenes and Charicleia* in Christian perspective contains interesting points for a better understanding of *J & A* in the time of its composition and during its later Christian reception. Indeed, reading Heliodorus' novel as the exemplary representation of Charicleia's spiritual journey 'from darkness to light' underlines the religious-mystical senses contained in the pagan novel, while decoding its significance in a different context. If *J & A* was originally composed in a Hellenistic-Jewish milieu, contemporary to the rise of the Greek novel, its later manuscripts testify to its Christian re-appropriation and

adaptation according to its readers' outlook in times and places which seem to be far removed from its ancient historical -cultural background .

One of the questions about *J & A* which I refer to in passing without embarking in a thorough discussion is the scholarly distinction between its short and long recensions. Indeed, from the first philological studies of the manuscripts of *J & A*, the extant witnesses have been catalogued in families which conveyed texts differing in length as a result of the presence or omission of certain passages. This variation has been assumed in traditional scholarship as the evidence for an older tradition of *J & A* which was later re-elaborated in the course of its textual transmission. The philological debate is most clearly associated with the works of Mark Philonenko and Christoph Burchard, whose earlier studies suggested opposite interpretations of the novel's textual history. As is well known to readers familiar with modern scholarship on the subject, Philonenko estimated on the basis of linguistic-stylistic criteria that the short texts of *J & A* were closer to the original Jewish-Hellenistic narrative, and considered specific passages of the longer texts as later additions, however without being too specific about the cultural contexts which prompted these re-elaborations. On the other hand, from his first manuscript collations to the latest critical editions of *J & A*, Burchard supported the priority of the long text, initially arguing that literary-religious works such as *J & A* are likely to be epitomized in the course of their textual transmission. Most recently the comprehensive philological investigation on the Greek texts by Burchard and Uta Barbara Fink confirms that witnesses of the long text present better readings, thus proving to be 'originals' of the literary tradition of *J & A*, so to speak. In the present work I rely on Fink's revised edition of the Greek text, which is the accurate and scientific result of many years of philological study. When I refer in what follows to possible additions in the text of *J & A* I base my proposals on the literary analysis of the texts explored in various feasible contexts and not on a rigorous philological method. Studies in the textual history of *J & A* have probably achieved as much as they can in the work of Fink. But there is still more to be done to understand this novel against the literary culture of the Roman era. The following three chapters are intended as a contribution to this process.

Chapter 1

Joseph and Aseneth as a Jewish-Hellenistic Novel or a Commentary on Scripture

1. 1 Introduction

What was the purpose of the story of Joseph and Aseneth? Ancient readers of the novel adapted its content, making it significant to their time. Subsequent scribes worked on the texts of *J & A* as interpreters and authors, detecting further or different senses in the narrative. The conventional definition of *J & A* as a novel does not exclude the likelihood that the story was conceived of as a sacred text, an expansion of the biblical episodes close to Jewish aggada as well as to hagiography in early Christian environments. It is however necessary to start the present chapter, which is dedicated to the genre of the novel in antiquity, with a survey of the analogies

between *J & A* and the Greco-Roman pagan novel, in order to understand to what extent the biblical narrative can be considered as a Jewish-Hellenistic variation on the novelistic genre. In section 1.2 the scholarship about *J & A* in relation to the Hellenistic novel is taken into account, while the passages of *J & A* containing motifs and commonplaces of the ancient novel are analysed. From this literary survey it will hopefully emerge that *J & A* in the extant form appears to draw on the literary code of the pagan novel, but its relation to 'novelistic' episodes of the biblical narrative may attest that the tradition developed independently, or as a parallel Jewish-early Christian branch of the genre. On the other hand, points of contact between *J & A* and the Greco-Roman novel testify to multicultural relations in the Hellenistic time that is, from the age of Alexander the Great to the end of Antiquity.

The narrative structure of *J & A* is delimited by the two verses of Genesis that mention Aseneth as the daughter of the priest of Heliopolis, who becomes Joseph's wife by the Pharaoh's will and the mother of Ephraim and Manasseh, the future forefathers of two tribes of Israel.[1] The time of the story is therefore articulated on the basis of the biblical passage from the seven years of plenty to the seven years of famine, a time that becomes symbolic in the plot of *J & A*. Indeed, Joseph is portrayed as a religious-ethical model, the benefactor and nourisher in the land of Egypt, who obtains honours and royal status from the Pharaoh as well as reverence from Pentephres, perhaps the representative of Egyptian/pagan wisdom and lore. Joseph's deeds in the novel remark almost in stereotyped terms his qualities as a flawless giver of life and a saviour: the hero travels across the realm of Egypt to collect the excess of the crop and prepare for the imminent dearth, he is the Pharaoh's faithful minister and undertakes the role of a tutor for the youngest heir to the throne. Joseph's words are significant to confirm the symbolic value of the character: he refers to the memory of divine creation of the world when justifying his departure from Heliopolis on the same day as his arrival, and adopts the imagery of creation in his prayer of blessing for Aseneth.

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[1] *Gen.* 41.45: Καὶ ἐκάλεσε Φαραὼ τὸ ὄνομα Ἰωσὴφ, Ψονθομφανήχ· καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ τὴν Ἀσενὲθ θυγατέρα Πετεφρῆ ἱερέως Ἡλιουπόλεως αὐτῷ εἰς γυναῖκα. *Gen.* 41.50: Τῷ δὲ Ἰωσὴφ ἐγένοντο υἱοὶ δύο πρὸ τοῦ ἐλθεῖν τὰ ἑπτὰ ἔτη τοῦ λιμοῦ, οὓς ἔτεκεν αὐτῷ Ἀσενὲθ ἡ θυγάτηρ Πετεφρῆ ἱερέως Ἡλιουπόλεως.

The concepts emerging in *J & A*, such as the value of repentance or change of heart (μετάνοια), the motif of confession to God (ἐξομολώγησις) and the believer's humiliation (ταπεινώσις) while praying to the Lord, may belong in a Jewish-Hellenistic context, as parallels in Philo of Alexandria's exegesis seem to testify. However, these concepts are both embedded in the narrative, thus attesting their possible origins in an early Hellenistic tradition, and contained in the titles that marked the beginning of the novel in the later, medieval and Renaissance manuscripts. If the religious-theoretical content of *J & A* was significant, provided that the tradition already existed, in the hypothetical Jewish-Hellenistic background, its connotations changed during the later Christian reception of the novel. In fact, titles of the story record the themes perceived as central in *J & A* that is, the sacred marriage of the protagonists, Aseneth's confession and Joseph's role as a nourisher. The definition of the narrative as 'edifying' in the title form διήγησις ψυχωφελής is indicative of the blending of a Hellenistic definition for the genre of the novel and a typically Christian notion of something 'useful for the soul'.

Starting from a discussion of the concepts that define the literary form of *J & A* and the ways the novel was conceived in the environments of its reception, section 1.2.1 explores mystical elements in *J & A*, which assimilate the biblical narrative to a story of divine revelation of arcane mysteries. While *J & A* contains definitely a Jewish-Christian religious message, the present chapter tackles the issue of relations between the ancient pagan novel and religion/mysteries. Although the interpretive readings of Kerényi and Merkelbach have not found much favour in scholarship about the ancient novel, their works include plenty of learned references to Hellenistic cults. The extant pagan novels refer to traditional religion while sometimes introducing semi-divine entities and supernatural events. Interestingly, the figure of Aseneth bears traits which make her resemble pagan goddesses, such as the Egyptian Isis and Neith, and the Artemis of Ephesus. These deities of Egypt and the Near East were appropriated and revisited in the eclectic Hellenistic culture; likewise, the figure of Aseneth, an Egyptian woman according to the biblical account, might have been portrayed on the model of a pagan goddess before her transformation in a Jewish mother and a Christian saint. Parallels with Hellenistic religious conceptions suggest an early tradition for *J & A*. In this connection, the

chapter takes into consideration the hypothesis that *J & A* was originally composed in Ptolemaic/Greco-Roman Egypt, in a cultural milieu close to the climate which saw the rise of the Hellenistic translation of Scripture in Greek and the legends recounting the translation, such as the *Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates* or the *Book of Jesus Ben Sirach*.

Rather than contemporary or recent events, however, the novel of *J & A* reinterprets the biblical Joseph in Jewish-Hellenistic outlook. In the biblical episodes, Joseph is an emblematic figure of ancient magic, dream-interpretation and fertility which is guaranteed by God's favourable spirit. Indeed, the Joseph of *J & A* illustrates an ideal ruler, able to re-establish peace and a fair government because God always sides with him. If *J & A* is compared to passages of Philo of Alexandria's treatises, in particular the *Life of Joseph*, it is possible to notice that common ideal traits are attributed to Joseph as the model politician and patriarch of Israel. The novel in early phases of transmission may have portrayed Joseph as the Diaspora hero for the people of Israel in Egypt as well as in Syria and Asia Minor. When the tradition of *J & A* was handed down in Christian environments, as the extant evidence testifies, Joseph was interpreted as an image of Christ and a saviour in typological terms that is, the biblical Joseph prefigured the Messiah.

Section 1.3 analyses passages from Philo of Alexandria's treatises that present *exempla* of government and political life, both in the history of the Hebrew patriarchs and Moses the lawgiver and in the author's contemporary milieu. Interestingly, throughout Philo's treatises Joseph's portrayal is complex, containing both praiseworthy traits and flaws. What did Philo mean by these ambivalent features in his characterization of Joseph? Perhaps that the Jewish people compromised their ethical precepts when mingling with alien cultures and dealing with political interests; Joseph may also embody the literal-historical and the allegorical senses of Scripture, which are applied to the interpretation of the exegete's contemporary time. For instance, on the level of the historical present time Joseph is the emblem of practical advice, strategic change and reporting of information in political life, while according to the senses that allegorical readings convey the hero is the ideal master and ruler of peoples. As in *J & A*, ideal 'historical' circumstances transcend the contingent age and become a universal possession for an indefinite time, from the

revered past of Hebrew lore to the future envisioned in immutable, eschatological terms.

A mystical atmosphere is created in the novel of *J & A* by means of significant key-words in the characters' speeches, odes and prayers. The language reminiscent of mystery initiation may be indicative of the Jewish-Hellenistic background of *J & A*. In fact, Jewish spirituality found its Greek expression in the philosophical-theological lexicon of the Hellenic tradition. Moreover, the positive characters in the novel undertake roles that illustrate ethical-spiritual concepts. While Joseph bears the traits of a man of God and a saviour, Aseneth is compared to the Hebrew mothers, the Patriarchs' wives, thus being connected to the Jewish heritage. After her change of heart, the divine envoy associates Aseneth with an allegorical figure, the hypostasis of Repentance (Μετάνοια) in heaven; the concept belongs in Classical philosophical contexts as well as being significant in the contemporary Jewish outlook. Thus, wise Levi and the 'man from heaven' foresee Aseneth's eternal life in a superior spiritual dimension, when she will become a City of Refuge for all the people who repent in the name of God the Most High.[2] In analogous terms, a mystical dimension adding religious value to authoritative texts is created in the treatise on *Homeric Problems* by Heraclitus 'the Allegorist', an author active in the first/early second century A.D.

As I shall explore in section 1.4 according to Heraclitus' viewpoint Homer is a hierophant, a revealer of hallowed truth by means of the allegorical technique which is encoded in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Heraclitus' purpose of defending Homer from any charge of immorality is carried out in the commentary by adding further significance to Homeric episodes as well as emblematic roles to deities and heroes; for instance, the goddess Athena embodies sound rational thought and the wise change of mind. A thematic point of contact can be identified between *J & A* and the

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[2]The diction of 'God the Most High', ὁ ὕψιστος θεός, is related to the Hebrew expression 'El Elyon'; interestingly, this way to designate the divinity is attested in inscriptions from Jewish colonies in Ptolemaic Egypt; subsequently the expression was used to indicate the highest deity in late-antique pagan environments, thus testifying to forms of a 'pagan monotheism'. *J & A* might be witness to a semantic variation, denoting the religious-cultural passage of the notion of 'God the Most High' from an early Hellenistic-Jewish context to later Jewish/Christian environments which were in communication with pagan educated groups. Obviously the subject would deserve an extensive study in itself; see e. g. Mitchell (1999).

Homeric Problems in the interpretation of μετάνοια, the wise change of heart or the virtue of repentance. However, on a more profound plane, a comparison between the Jewish-early Christian novel and the allegorical treatise on Homeric poetry is feasible on account of the complex, multicultural ideology of Hellenism in which both texts take part.

1.2 Towards a Definition of *J & A*: Remarks on the Genre of the Novel in Antiquity.

Although it is often remarked that Greco-Roman antiquity did not know a specific name to indicate the novel, [3] let alone literary criticism about the genre, commonplaces in the narrative plot, motifs and a particular worldview qualify long prose works as canonical representatives of the novel. The Greek literary texts extant in a complete form,[4] show a remarkable consistency in the plot: two young exponents of the Hellenic, aristocratic urban society, a girl and a youth, meet up and immediately or as inevitable consequence fall in love; their union appears to be established in the superior divine sphere, but doomed at the same time, threatened by obstacles and unfortunate events, either before or after the protagonists' marriage; eventually all difficulties are solved in a happy or reasonably fair ending for almost all the positive characters. The scholarly definition of the extant Greek novels as 'ideal' or 'canonical' comes from this pattern as well as from the ethical values expressed in the novels. In fact, the representation of mutual affection and support in a heterosexual union is attuned with the ideal position of the family in philosophical theories about the human society in the Hellenistic period.[5] The concept of a codified genre posits further questions about authorial identity, purpose and anticipated readership of the Greek novels. [6]

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[3]Terms to define the ancient novel are known from authorial meta-literary remarks embedded in the novels or from literary commentaries about more general conceptions of narrative, such as the Greek πλάσμα (composition, made up story), δρᾶμα (action), διήγησις (narrative), ἱστορία and μῦθος (history, narrative), and the Latin *argumentum*, *fabula*. See e.g. Whitmarsh (2008) 3.

[4] Xenophon Ephesius' novel may be an epitome.

[5]See e. g. Hägg (1983) 5-80.

[6]E. g. Swain (1996) 101 distinguishes between folktale, fairy-stories, and the novel proper, stating that '(the novel, *sc.*) is marked out by its unmistakable combination of abstract form and lived experience.'

Although no specific theories or rhetorical discussions about the ancient novel have been transmitted from the Hellenistic age, it is possible to derive some contextual information on the cultural-literary background which saw the rise of the genre. Scanty literary testimonies and meta-literary definitions in the extant novels confirm that the genre was fluid, open to various topics, and therefore its boundaries were not well established. However the novel was known as a long prose work, distinct from historiography, drama and declamation. In fact, a certain consistency in the use of conventional titles to refer to the novels suggests that the stories were deemed worthy of a specific place in literary-intellectual production. Tim Whitmarsh has recently argued that close examination of textual evidence in papyri and ancient testimonies leads to 'identify three broad categories of title elements for the novels: (A) τὰ περί or τὰ κατά + name(s) of protagonist(s);[7] (B) content descriptors (a neuter plural noun or adjective ending in –ικά);[8] (C) the names of female protagonists (e. g. Χαρίκλεια, Λευκίππη), without τὰ περί or τὰ κατά.'[9] Whitmarsh' study confronts the traditional view that original titles for the novels were content descriptors that is, a neuter plural noun or adjective denoting an ethnic group, thus attesting the dependence of the novel on historiography. In fact, occurrences of titles of the type (A) reveal that the formula including the protagonists' names was likely to be shared as a definition of the novelistic genre in

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[7] E.g. for Chariton, the colophon to a second-to third-century A.D. papyrus fragment records the title τὰ περὶ Καλλιρόην διηγήματα, and the thirteenth-century Florentine MS known as Conventi Soppressi 627 identifies the novel as τὰ περὶ Χαιρέαν καὶ Καλλιρόην ἐρωτικὰ διηγήματα; similarly, the colophon to the earliest Vatican manuscript of Achilles Tatius (twelfth to thirteenth century) refers to τὰ περὶ Λευκίππην καὶ Κλειτοφῶντα ἐρωτικὰ πλάσματα; see Whitmarsh (2005) 590-592.

[8] Whitmarsh (2005) 592-593. This form of title seems cognate to historical works, and recurs in Byzantine testimonies: for Xenophon of Ephesos the lexicon of Suda (tenth century A.D.), s.v. Ξενοφῶν Ἐφέσιος ἱστορικός reads: Ἐφεσιακά· ἔστι δὲ ἐρωτικὰ βιβλία ι′ περὶ Ἀβροκόμου καὶ Ἀνθίας· καὶ περὶ τῆς πόλεως Ἐφεσίων. Heliodorus' manuscript titles and colophons vary considerably; among them, both τὰ περὶ Θεαγένης καὶ Χαρίκλειαν Αἰθιοπικά and the simplified forms Αἰθιοπικά, Αἰθιοπικὸν βιβλίον are attested, and also common in late antiquity and the Byzantine period, e.g. in the fifth-century historian Sokrates Ekklesiastikos (*HE* 5.22= test. I Colonna: Αἰθιοπικά), and Photios cod. 73 (= test. IV Colonna) uses Αἰθιοπικόν [*sc.* βιβλίον].

[9] In fact, for Heliodorus, the convention Χαρίκλεια is also frequent in the Byzantine period, for instance Nikephoros Kallistos (*HE* 12.34= test XVII Colonna) claims that Αἰθιοπικά was the original title, and νῦν δὲ καλοῦσι ταῦτα Χαρίκλειαν, 'now it is called *Charikleia*'; see Whitmarsh (2005) 593.

Hellenism, thus testifying to the importance that was given to the personal, private story of the protagonists. [10]

The conventional title of *J & A* is used by analogy with the Greek and Roman novels, although the text shares significant points of contact with Jewish and early-Christian apocrypha and pseudepigrapha. Interestingly, title-forms in the extant manuscripts of *J & A* seem to follow the pattern of their pagan analogues.[11] The headings in the manuscripts of *J & A* can be reduced to the forms: *Deeds* (Πράξεις) *of the most beautiful* (τοῦ παγκάλου) *Joseph and of his wife Aseneth, daughter of Pentephres priest of Heliopolis*, and *Life and Confession* (Βίος καὶ ἐξομολόγησις) *of Aseneth daughter of Pentephres priest of Heliopolis and how the most beautiful* (ὁ πάγκαλος) *Joseph took her as his wife.*[12] It is noteworthy that titles were added by scribes in order to identify the literary work, summarizing at the same time its content. In the later Christian environments of its transmission, titles represent contemporary perceptions and re-interpretations of the narrative.

Consider, by way of example, διήγησις ψυχωφελὴς περὶ τῆς σιτοδοσίας Ἰωσηφ τοῦ παγκάλου καὶ περὶ Ἀσενεθ καὶ πως ὁ θεὸς αὐτοὺς συνέζευξεν, which can be translated as 'Edifying narrative about the distribution of grain of Joseph the beautiful and about Aseneth, and how God joined them together.' This title contains significantly one of the generic terms that designate the novel in

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[10] Whitmarsh (2005) esp. 596, and cf. 589: 'If I am right, then this will further substantiate the claim that there was a coherent sense of the genre of the novel in antiquity.'

[11] Tim Whitmarsh has pointed out that 'non pagan novels', like *J & A* itself, 'offer no secure parallel' for the purpose of defining the novelistic genre in antiquity on the basis of title conventions. Whitmarsh (2005) 603, n. 56, where Burchard (1985) 181 is quoted: 'Ancient custom suggests that Joseph and Aseneth had a title, probably given in full at the end and prefixed in a possibly shorter form at the opening, but none that have come down to us seems to represent it'; cf. Philonenko (1968) 128: the editor acknowledges Burchard's earlier work on the MSS, and the philologist's attempt to classify several variant readings for the title. Philonenko goes further the convention to define *J & A* according to the category of the ancient novel, stating that the work can be understood only if its novelistic traits are acknowledged.

[12] West (1974) 70, n. 1, quotes the two forms of the title in Greek, asserting that 'It is unlikely that the author attached much importance in the title'. Philonenko (1968) 128: in the *apparatus criticus* the titles transmitted in the MSS and used in the edition are rendered as: εξομολογησις και προσευχη ασενεθ θυγατρος πεντεφρη ιερεως (MS B: this title is preferred by Philonenko, who translates: *Confession et Prière d'Aséneth, fille du prêtre Pentéphrès*); and διηγησις ψυχωφελης περι της σιτοδοσιας ιωσηφ του παγκαλου και περι ασενεθ και πως ο θεος αυτους συνεζευξεν (MS D).

antiquity, διήγησις, while the attribute ψυχωφελής hints at the ethical purpose of the narrative. The theme of Joseph's σιτοδοσία or, his role as a dispenser of nourishment, recalls his traditional portrayal from the Hebrew Bible to post-biblical commentaries, whereas the focus on the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth, which was planned by God (ὁ θεὸς αὐτοὺς συνέζευξεν), suggests the reading of the story with additional values in the later Christian environments of its rich reception. The relevant genre-descriptors in the titles, Πράξεις and Βίος, indicate that the novel was conceived as part of the 'acts' of important characters like the apostles and saints, as well as of early-Christian hagiography. The choice to preserve through the copying activity a biblical, Old Testament setting rather than the more recent time of Jesus and the apostles may attest an intention to link the Jewish heritage to contemporary religious beliefs. In addition, Joseph's attribute of πάγκαλος is a likely point of contact with the narrative traditions retelling the deeds of 'Joseph the beautiful'. While extraordinary endeavours are ascribed to Joseph and Aseneth alike, the second title form focuses on Aseneth's life and confession. Indeed, *J & A* represented a source for hagiographies of women, saints and martyrs in the 'passions'.[13]

The novel of *J & A* has been included in the literary corpus of the 'Jewish novellas', narratives that became part of the Christian biblical canons. However, literary devices in *J & A* make the novel different from the stories of *Esther*, *Tobit*, *Judith* and the additions to the book of Daniel, *Susannah* and *Bel and the Dragon*. It is noteworthy that *J & A* shares features with these biblical traditions, however its literary form indicates a different purpose. Indeed, by quoting the verses of Genesis that record the marriage of the protagonists, *J & A* points to its function as a commentary on the biblical story with additional information, thus highlighting its relation to the sacred text. The history of its tradition, provided that the origins of *J & A* are Jewish and Hellenistic, as is the case of the 'Jewish novellas', testifies that the story was both conceived and transmitted with different aims. In fact, the 'Jewish novellas' were written by Greek-speaking Jews and later became part of the Christian canons, as 'apocryphal' or 'deutero-canonical' books. The textual history

[13] Philonenko (1968) 110-117, appendix about the passions of the Saints Barbara, Christine and Irene.

of *J & A* can be modelled hypothetically on the reception of the *apocrypha*, as the extant manuscript evidence only points to the novel's Christian tradition which was never counted in religious canons of Scripture but lived as an independent story until it was included in the modern, literary canon of the pseudepigrapha.

The characters of *J & A* belong in the sacred history of Israel, which from a Graeco-Roman perspective was likely to be seen as narrative.[14] Mythical accounts represent foundation stories, suitable to justify the present time with the invention of encounters between the human and the divine sphere in remote ages. Ancient heroes become protectors of local cults, revered ancestors of places which are loaded with emblematic significance.[15] Traditional religion and myth, essential in antiquity and not disjoined from all other aspects of life and cultural expressions, play a fundamental role in the Hellenistic cultural backdrop. In the novels divinities such as Aphrodite, Artemis, Dionysus, Pan and the Nymphs are repeatedly mentioned, called upon by characters, or assumed as terms of comparison to describe the beauty of the protagonists. Semi-divine entities contribute to create a mysterious, eerie atmosphere, whereas Tyche, the personification of fortune, is deemed responsible for crucial events. The Egyptian goddess Isis was appropriated as a new divinity in Greek and Roman culture since the early Hellenistic time; her attributes and deeds, especially the quest for her spouse Osiris, might have been transferred in the narrative vicissitudes of the novels.[16] Relations between the Graeco-Roman pantheon, mystery religions and the novels have been posited in the overall discussion about the origins of the novelistic genre. Kerényi envisioned the profound sense of the novels in Egyptian mythology and religion, while Reinhold Merkelbach went further the Egyptian background, positing that in the novels, with the important exception of Chariton's *Callirhoe*, were encoded the mysteries of Hellenic/Near Eastern divinities, for instance Dionysus in the pastoral novel of *Daphnis & Chloe*,

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[14] See e.g. the discussion about Jewish narrative *aggada* in Graeco-Latin perspective by Kamesar (1994b).

[15] Bowie, in Συγχάρματα (2006) 1-20, gives a detailed depiction of references to the classical past in the Greek novels; each author created a literary world interwoven with learned inter-textual citations. The reconstruction of the past in the ancient Greek novel results in a rewriting of cultural history.

[16] The hypothesis is famously bound to the name of Karl Kerényi who in his book *Die griechisch-orientalische Romanliteratur in religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung* argued that characters in the ancient novels represent the suffering of the gods on earth.

or the cult of the sun-god in Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*.[17] Although Kerényi and Merkelbach have not received much scholarly approval, their theses envisioned for the first time cultural relations between the Graeco-Roman world and Near Eastern cultures; rather than representing in fiction mysteries of divinities, the novels can thus be considered as the Hellenistic expression of a most ancient cultural 'osmosis' in the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world.[18]

Chariton of Aphrodisias' *Callirhoe* and Xenophon of Ephesus' *Ephesian Tales* have been considered in scholarly criticism as witnesses to an earlier phase in the history of the genre. Like the now fragmentary *Ninus Romance* and *Metiochus and Parthenope*, they appear to represent a more ancient phase in the genre of the novel. The earlier novels contain devices that became commonplaces, such as the *Scheintod*/apparent death motif, descriptions of dreams, visions, divine epiphanies and supernatural events. The later novels of Achilles Tatius, Longus and Heliodorus reiterate the narrative devices in sophisticated, complex forms, while adding rhetorical strategies and hints at philosophical senses. The five 'ideal' novels portray a society that is founded upon ethical principles, inheritance of the glorified classical past of Hellas. Like contemporary rhetoric, in the form of the learned declamations that represented the cultural past of Hellas, the novel depicted in narrative form the historical time of the ancestors, material for collective memory and the consciousness of belonging in the same heritage. However, in the world of the novel ethical-social ideals can be questioned if not even subverted. By way of example, Callirhoe is so beautiful a woman that the viewer may mistake her for the goddess Aphrodite; she is loving and faithful, but soon after the wedding Chaereas is deceived by a group of mocking young men who fake the new wife is having an affair; in a fit of jealousy Chaereas kicks her, provoking her apparent death and starting her trials. Although Callirhoe is eventually restored to Chaereas' bosom in a fairly happy ending, she leaves their son with Dionysus, the governor of Miletus

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[17] R. Merkelbach, *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike*, Beck, München, 1962.
[18] See Grottanelli (1987): parallels between ancient biblical narratives and the Hellenistic novels are especially highlighted.

whom she agreed to marry for the sake of her still unborn child.[19] Therefore the novel's ideal form is mixed with variant outcomes of the story.

If we wanted to evaluate the position of *J & A* among the ancient novels, we could point out that like the extant Greek novels, *J & A* depicts a remote, indefinite past. The age of the biblical patriarchs might have been conceived at the borderline between history and myth, while it constituted, in the economy of Scripture, part of the chronological framework necessary to count historical time in Jewish culture. Original content was added to recount Joseph's deeds in narrative traditions such as *J & A* itself, which has been defined as 'the most Greek of the Jewish novels'. In fact, all novelistic commonplaces can be detected in the narrative: the extraordinary beauty of the protagonists, the heroine's sheltered life as a maiden, the presence of several suitors fighting to marry her, the son of Pharaoh in the role of a spurned rival, bearing grudge and desire of revenge, the overcoming of obstacles and dangers, the eventual happy ending for the positive characters.[20]

As in the case of Xenophon of Ephesus, no papyri of *J & A* have been discovered, which may allow a more scientific date and reconstruction of the archetypal text.[21] On account of its plot and novelistic features, *J & A* seems to be closer to the earlier, historical novels. As already noted, commonplaces in the plot, the presence of historical and fictional characters, linguistic features and modes of expression indicate a closer relation of *J & A* to the subgenre of the historical novel. All the biblical characters in the story are part of the mythical-historical past of Israel, while the only fictional personage is the king Joakim, mentioned by the Pharaoh.[22] In a different hypothesis, the original composition of *J & A* may be earlier than the extant Greek novels, representing a parallel tradition among the narratives

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[19] The romance of Callirhoe contains several inter-textual references to the Homeric poems; for instance Callirhoe's bigamy finds an illustrious parallel in the story of Helen of Troy.

[20] Cf. Philonenko (1968) 43: 'D'un roman d'amour, l'auteur connaît tous les clichés…'

[21] Philonenko (1974) 74-75: it is impossible to reconstruct the original, more ancient text of *J & A*, unless an unexpected discovery occurs. In fact, in Philonenko's words, 'Retrouver l'original de *Joseph et Aséneth* n'est pas la tâche d'un éditeur, c'est celle de l'archéologue'.

[22] *J & A*, 1. 7-9: Pharaoh reminds his firstborn son that another princess, the daughter of the king of Moab, Joakim, is engaged to him. The presence of both invented and historical characters as well as of imaginary places is a feature of the so called Jewish-Hellenistic novels; for instance, *Esther* introduces king Ahasuerus, while the village of Bethulia in *Judith* is a symbolic place. In *J & A* only one character is not biblical, therefore not historical, whereas in *Callirhoe* the only historical personage is the general of Syracuse Hermocrates, father of the heroine; v. Braginskaya (2005-2007).

flourishing in Egypt and the ancient Near East. A feasible milieu for the rise of *J & A* might have been Ptolemaic or Graeco-Roman Egypt, as its content seems to confirm.

One of the solid markers of the novel's origins and background is its literary style, close to *κοινή* Greek, the language which was selectively adopted by writers of the first century A.D., such as the historian Diodorus of Sicily, Plutarch, Dio of Prusa, Philo of Alexandria and Josephus.[23] The Greek novels, on the other hand, can be considered as interesting case-studies for the cultural phenomenon of Atticism, which is characterized, in literature, by the use of archaizing Greek, in order to imitate the Attic prose of classical orators, such as Lysias and Demosthenes. Chariton's vocabulary, however, includes both atticizing and *κοινή* terms, in line with the literary trend widespread in the first century A.D.[24] Points of contact between *J & A* and the earlier novels, as well as Philo and Josephus, may constitute further evidence in support of a literary background in the first centuries A.D. for the Hellenistic-Jewish transmission of *J & A*. In addition, the vocabulary of *J & A* coincides with the Hellenistic Septuagint, the translation of Scripture in Greek that dates from the mid-third/second centuries B.C., although about forty words in *J & A* are typical of the later Jewish versions of Symmachus and Aquila,[25] as well as of the New Testament.[26]

Scholars such as Philonenko stated that *J & A* was conceived as a *romance* by its anonymous author, an individual personality able to draw on various literary sources in order to produce an Egyptian-Jewish novel in Greek. Indeed, biblical

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[23] Dio of Prusa can be considered to a certain extent as an atticist author.

[24] Ruiz-Montero (1991) 484: about two thirds of Chariton's vocabulary coincide with the lexicon of the New Testament and papyri, while among the authors of his time Chariton shares more similarities with Plutarch, Josephus and Philo; cf. Bowie (2002) 49: a wider and deeper examination of Chariton's language has shown that the novelist from Aphrodisia was not immune to Atticism, rather the author shares Atticisms, late words that is, terms attested after the third century B.C., colloquialisms and Ionisms with his supposed contemporaries, especially Plutarch, and poeticisms with Lucian.

[25] Simon (1986) 59-60: Aquila's Jewish version of Scripture aimed to offer to the Jews of the dispersion a religious translation of the Septuagint closer to the ideology of Palestinian Judaism and the early rabbinic culture; Simon argues that the need to have a more orthodox version of Scripture in Greek as a response to the Hellenistic Septuagint testifies to the importance of Diaspora Greek-speaking communities. Symmachus was a Jewish Christian who lived at the end of the second century A.D.; his Jewish version of Scripture circulated in a time when the Septuagint was appropriated by Christians; Symmachus represents the Jewish communities' endeavour to preserve their culture even outside Palestine, as well as attesting the use of Greek for religious purposes in both Jewish and Christian milieux. Cf. Simon (1986) 267-268.

[26] Philonenko (1968) 27-32.

episodes, religious tales and popular legends are evoked in an original literary work.[27] Philonenko can also be credited with attempting a new definition for the genre of *J & A*, because inter-textual references and underlying senses embedded in the novel require accordingly a complex interpretation. Therefore, Philonenko named *les romans de Joseph et Aséneth* the sub-genres which can be identified in *J & A*, explaining them as *roman missionnaire*, *roman à clef* and *roman mystique*.[28] Elements of the three novelistic categories coexist in a religious-allegorical narrative that 'quoted' the pagan erotic novel while presenting biblical content, and was subsequently handed down as a Christian edifying story.

Philonenko's definition of *J & A* as a *roman à clef* presupposes that its characters are figures for historical personages. He takes into consideration Egyptian mythical tales of divinities and Hellenistic re-interpretations concerning their prerogatives as well as accounts of creation. In fact, Egyptian traditions about the origins of the cosmos seem to contain parallels with expressions, numbers and the characters' attributes as depicted in *J & A*. Aseneth may thus be represented as a figure of Neith, virgin goddess protector of the Nile's delta, of the red crown of Egypt, whose symbolic features are the bee and the reed. In fact the announcement scene in the novel associates Aseneth with the uncommon bees swarming from the honeycomb. After Aseneth has transformed in a wise and saint mother of Israel, she exhorts Dan and Gad, Joseph's brothers who sided with the son of Pharaoh in the ambush to kidnap her, to hide in the 'thicket of reeds', until she has spoken to the virtuous brothers and appeased them. As Philonenko has remarked, the Greek expression for the 'thicket of reeds', ὕλη τοῦ καλάμου, might be ambiguous, referring both to the marsh and to the primordial matter, which is regulated in myths of creation by ancient divinities, such as indeed Neith in the *Myth of the Sun*.

More recently Maria Kasyan has pointed out that the announcement scene of *J & A* contains apocalyptic elements, while testifying to 'intersections of Mediterranean traditions in the Hellenistic epoch'.[29] In her interpretation, the images

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[27] Philonenko (1968) 32-48.
[28] Each sub-category is given a detailed explanation in Philonenko (1968) 53-98.
[29] I am indebted to Kasyan's paper, which was delivered at the ICAN 2008 in Lisbon. I have not read further versions of her contribution. Starting from Philonenko's reading of Aseneth as a figure of the goddess Neith, Kasyan also points out that there was a 'Hellenistic merger of Neith and Athena

of the bees-honey represent a 'sacramental culmination of conversion', whereas the description of the virgin Aseneth covered by bees is unique, finding no parallels in the available Jewish-Hellenistic sources. In ancient conceptions, bees are chaste creatures and providers of a food which can be used as a libation and an offer to divinities, bearing a different significance from wine and the blood of sacrificial victims; therefore bees are associated with chthonic deities. Kasyan has especially highlighted parallels between Aseneth and the Artemis of Ephesus, the patroness of the multicultural city, emporium and crossroads of economic-cultural exchanges in Asia Minor and the entire Mediterranean world.[30] Interestingly, Artemis of Ephesus is a virgin goddess, represented with bees/honeycombs hanging from her garments; she receives the epithet of Bee, and her priestesses are called μελίσσαι, being symbolically the 'bees of the goddess'. As the major goddess of the πόλις of Ephesus, the ancient Ionic colony on the coast of Asia, the Artemis of Ephesus is particularly kind to strangers. In order to remark her protective role in the city, the Artemis of Ephesus is often represented with the *corona muralis* that is, a crown made of the city walls or a temple on her head. In the announcement of the man from heaven, Aseneth becomes a 'City of Refuge', and is described as a 'walled mother-city'[31]; in addition, even her first portrayal introduces the heroine as μεγάλη, epithet which is used in the Bible to indicate women's high social position rather than their appearance;[32] on the other hand, the term is often used, both in the LXX and in New Testament writings, to refer to a city, such as Gibeon, Sidon, Nineveh, Babylon; the attributes of μεγάλη, μεγίστη are well-known cultic epithets of the main city-goddess of Ephesus.[33] In conclusion, Kasyan has remarked that both the allegorical city of Aseneth and the city of Ephesus, under the patronage of Artemis, welcome

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worshipped in Saïs'; in my opinion, this may explain points of contact between Aseneth's portrayal in *J & A* and the allegorical interpretation of Athena in the exegesis of Philo of Alexandria.

[30]Ephesus is one of the most ancient Greek colonies in Asia Minor. From the sixth century B.C. the image of the bees is frequent on coins; the imagery of a bee-swarm separating from the main swarm represents the migration (ἀποικία) of the colonists from the mother-city (μετρόπολις).

[31]Cf. *J & A*, 15.7; 16.16. For the biblical concept of the 'cities of refuge', see *Num.* 35; *Josh.* 20.2-3; 21.13.

[32]Still following Kasyan, I quote e.g. 2 Kgs 4.8

[33]This very formula is used by 'men of Ephesus' in argument with the apostle Paul in Acts, 19.28.34.

newcomers;[34] Aseneth is herself symbol of a new community of Jewish proselytes, so that the novel was addressed to the Jewish Diaspora, using pagan imagery to convey the value of transforming pagan lore in the monotheistic religion of Israel.[35]

If we return briefly to Philonenko's analysis, we shall notice that it was attuned to the outlook of Hellenistic-Jewish authors. In fact, the starting point of the novel from the Joseph-story of *Genesis* reveals that the holy books were perceived as ever living accounts worth telling from both Jewish and Graeco-Roman perspectives. Thus, novelistic themes were features to captivate the attention of a contemporary audience, while the remote, mythical time of the Patriarchs was still history in the ideology of Jews living in Palestine or Egypt during the Hellenistic era. Significantly, according to Jewish-Hellenistic writings Joseph not only found a successful career in Egypt as the Pharaoh's chief-minister, but he also took over royalty on behalf of the successor to the throne, becoming a paradigmatic hero for Jews of the Diaspora. The narrative time in the distant historical past also assimilates *J & A* to the Greek erotic novels, set in the archaic time when mainland Greece and its colonies still possessed political freedom from the Roman control. Indeed if the Greek novels contain plenty of references to the cultural past of Hellas, *J & A* reinterprets ancient Hebrew lore from Hellenistic perspective according to contemporary religious, literary and intellectual needs.

Other scholarly studies of *J & A* imply its definition as a *roman à clef*. The interpretation of the novel as a religious testimony of Jewish sectarian groups, such as those of the Essenes[36] in Qumran or the Therapeutics, presupposes that the characters in *J & A* embody paradigmatic figures for Jewish believers.[37] In addition,

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[34]Kasyan also notices that Artemis Ephesia is the goddess protecting the refugees in Achilles Tatius 8. 8. 9.

[35]Quoting with slight variations from Kasyan (2008): 'Thus, the novel addressing the Jewish Diaspora uses well-known pagan imagery to demonstrate how paganism can be transformed into righteous monotheism of a different religious society, a society desperate to defend its religious uniqueness in (a) pagan environment.'

[36] Kasyan (2008) also remarks that priests of Artemis were called 'essenes', a rare Ionic word, which is found in Callimachus' *Hymn to Artemis*, 237-258, and is possibly connected with the Hittite *išha*, meaning 'lord, master', in accusative *išhan*; thus the Jewish community is not accidentally homonymous, and the name 'essenes' is not Semitic, but Greek in its origins, and transferred from the priests of Ephesus to the Palestinian community.

[37]Cf. Delcor (1962): *J & A* is seen as a love-romance which is best understood if considered as the literary product of a Therapeutic environment; the only literary testimony on the Therapeutics is Philo of Alexandria's treatise *de vita contemplativa*. Beckwith (1984) suggests that symbolic numbers

should *J & A* represent in fiction a precise historical event, the founding of the Jewish temple in Leontopolis, during the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (186-145 B.C.), as Gideon Bohak has proposed, the protagonists of the novel may be counterparts of historical personages.[38] Thus, the distinction between the *roman à clef* and an allegory is blurred, if *J & A* is decoded as the account of an event contemporary to the time of the author, however featured as a prophecy which was firstly revealed in the mythical time of the Patriarchs.

Moreover, its relation to the Septuagint makes *J & A* a Jewish-Hellenistic narrative expanding the Joseph story of *Genesis*. The novel re-elaborates the biblical account, starting from Joseph's journey throughout the realm of Egypt and his arrival in Heliopolis, the 'City of the Sun', where the hero meets Aseneth. The focus on the love-story of the protagonists and on Aseneth's 'conversion' has also been interpreted as the purpose of resolving a problematic event in the sacred history of Israel. Indeed, the marriage of Joseph, son of the patriarch Jacob, to the daughter of the priest of Heliopolis, could constitute matter for apologetic or edifying stories.[39] Consequently, *J & A* may have been originally an *aggadic* tale or, a narrative that integrates the sacred texts, explaining passages of the ancient history of the Jewish nation, with additional ethical purpose. Therefore, both the content and the form of *J & A* make the novel a unique literary work, at the boundaries between ancient novel and historical re-writings of Scripture.[40]

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indicating time, describing places and the characters' attributes in *J & A* reveal codified astrologic information about the Essenes' solar calendar.

[38]Bohak (1993)-(1996).

[39]E. g. O' Neill (1994).

[40]See Docherty (2004): although *J & A* draws only on a limited portion of the biblical narrative, it can be regarded as an example of 'rewritten Bible', more than as a Jewish-Hellenistic novel. However, *J & A* contains inter-textual references to various biblical passages of the Pentateuch, the five narrative books of the Bible, as well as the Prophets and the Psalms: see e. g. Inowlocki (2002), and Braginskaya (2005-2007): she also remarks that the notion of 'rewritten Bible' is meta-generic, so that it may apply to different literary genres, rather than constituting an independent genre in itself.

1.2.1 Mystical Elements in *J & A* as a Jewish-Hellenistic Narrative.

As we have seen, by way of a working hypothesis *J & A* can be read as a Jewish adaptation of the Hellenistic novel.[41] Howard Clark Kee developed Philonenko's statement that *J & A* contains all the *clichés* of a love-romance, asserting that the biblical narrative contains all the typical features which have been identified in the Hellenistic novels. In this interpretation, *J & A* is a Jewish novel that includes all the religious-mystical motifs scattered in the pagan novels. The religious dimension pervading *J & A* is thus constructed upon these features: *J & A* is aimed at promoting a cult; the story depicts a conversion experience; conversion leads to a sacred marriage; the literary style shifts between narrative and poetical/liturgical forms; the plot revolves around inner/external conflicts of the hero and heroine, and deliverance is accomplished by divine action; the story follows a climax, which involves the death and rebirth of the hero or heroine, a theophany and the self-dedication of the protagonists to the god.[42] These features assimilate the Greek and Roman novels to aretalogies, texts in verse with the practical function of praising the virtues of a benevolent divinity, such as Isis, Dionysius or Asclepius, celebrating episodes of rescue, healing or success. *J & A* might be the Jewish interpretation of a shared cultural background, which saw the rise of myths, sacred accounts, and the ancient novel as a literary expression of collective cultural values and expectations.[43]

The blissful solution in marriage, conventional τόπος of the ancient novel, is initially hindered by Aseneth's hostility towards a stranger, in her own words, 'the son of the shepherd of Canaan'[44] and by Joseph's parallel refusal to have any close contact with a worshiper of idols, dead and dumb gods, which are related to the symbolic triad of negative elements, bread, wine and oil as means of corruption, death and deceit.[45] In the narrative frame, Aseneth's change of heart is provoked by her love at first sight for Joseph, which is described in terms reminiscent of the classical conflict of emotions seizing the protagonists of the Greek novels, as well as

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[41] See e. g. Pervo (1976); Kee (1983) 398: the aim of the literary interpreter is 'to discern not only what is characteristic but also what is distinctive about the author's adaptation of the genre'; therefore the necessity of 'an analysis of J & A in relation to the paradigm of the Hellenistic romance'.
[42] The list in Kee (1983) 398, is quoted with slight variations.
[43] On the novel and aretalogy see Beck in Schmeling (1996): *J & A* is mentioned as a likely example of most allegorical Greek-Jewish novel.
[44] *J & A*, 4.9-11
[45] *J & A*, 8.5.

their literary predecessors, for instance Homer and archaic poetry. The miracle of the honeycomb and supernatural bees confirms Aseneth's change of heart and identity, which is described as an emblematic passage from darkness to light. It is feasible that in the perspective of Jews living in a multicultural environment during the Hellenistic age, the ethical value of marriage within the Jewish community was betokened in the tradition of Aseneth's conversion to the God of Joseph and Israel.[46]

The presence of a missionary thrust in *J & A* has been discussed in studies that emphasize the motif of conversion in the novel. According to this tradition, Aseneth represents the model-proselyte, a pagan worshiper of idols, who is emblematically driven to adopt Joseph's belief in the God of Israel as soon as she sees the prophetic light emanating from him.[47] We know from the extant testimonies that Jewish thinkers in the first century B.C. were likely to condemn Jewish veneration of idols, whereas pagan cults were admitted as legitimate for other civilizations.[48] Accordingly, Randall D. Chessnutt interpreted *J & A* as an educative-missionary tract, which was addressed to an expected readership of Jews. In his view, tensions in *J & A* stand for contrasts within Jewish communities, their religious-political parties and divisions in society. Thus, the motif of conversion may not signify to attract proselytes, whereas it may remind fellow-Jews of the necessity to remain in the right lines of thought and ritual practices.[49]

Indeed, the outlook conveyed in Aseneth's story seems to support a tolerant Jewish attitude towards pagans who are not encouraged to convert, as long as they act morally and prove to be pious worshipers, as is the case for Pentephres and Aseneth before her mystical passage to a new life. On the other hand, members of Jewish communities are represented in Joseph's rhetorical speech to Aseneth as those belonging in the same 'family'.[50] Similarly in Aseneth's prayers those who recognize

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[46]The purpose of portraying a story of conversion to Judaism and consequent marriage between a born Jew and a proselyte seems more applicable to *J & A* if the original text can be dated in the first century A.D., and most likely after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D. It is in this time, in fact, that extant literary evidence dealing with distinction between Jews, gentiles and Christians was produced; see Goodman (1994) 48, 78-79, 127-128.

[47] *J & A*, 6.2-4.

[48]Goodman (1994) ch. 1.

[49]Chessnutt (1995).

[50]*J & A*, 8.5-6: 'It is not fitting for a God-fearing man… to kiss a foreign woman… But a God-fearing man will kiss his mother and his sister from his mother' s part, his sister from his tribe and his kin, and the wife of his marriage, who bless with their mouth the God who lives'.

Joseph as a 'son of God' are advised not to sway from the strict monotheism of Israel.[51] It is noteworthy that *J & A* sketches a cultural environment through its characters' speeches, deeds and descriptions. As an allegorical figure, Aseneth may embody the Jewish inclination to accept alien polytheistic cults. Pentephres is introduced like influential historical characters in the Greek novels, for instance the Syracusan general Hermocrates in *Callirhoe*. As a pagan priest and a wise man, Pentephres is a model of tolerance and respect for Jewish customs, when he orders that a separate table be laid for Joseph, because he knows that the hero, a 'champion of God' (ὁ δυνατὸς τοῦ θεοῦ), judges an abomination to share the same table with the Egyptians.[52] Pentephres' stance might be a model for representing Jewish-nationalist sentiment; his respect for the Jewish ritual customs about food might illustrate the acceptance of the Jewish special laws and the reversal of Egyptian hostility towards the Hebrew people in the Old Testament. Therefore the informative details given in the narrative may reflect the Jewish-Hellenistic concern about eating forbidden food or table-fellowship, although no special laws of purity are specified in *J & A*. The idols made of metals and stones are related to the symbolic negative triad of bread wine and oil as means of corruption, death and deceit, which have their counterpart in the same elements conveying eternal life and truth.

From these images, which illustrate ethical-religious principles, it is possible to infer that the thrust of *J & A* in Hellenistic Judaism was universalistic. In fact its allegorical imagery was received as content loaded with religious-mystical significance for Jews, Christians and perhaps pagan readers in the Hellenistic period. The time of the story in *J & A* is significant to convey a message of positive cultural acceptance to various audiences. Indeed the mythical age of the Patriarchs, when a wise Pharaoh granted Joseph and his people a position of honour in Egyptian society, speaks in favour of a cultural blending in the milieu of composition of *J & A*. Pentephres the Egyptian priest possesses wisdom to a higher degree than stereotypical pagan laymen. *J & A* may represent in Pentephres the embodiment of pagan monotheism, a still imperfect stage in the quest for wisdom and virtue

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[51] See e.g. *J & A*, 11.7 (Aseneth's 'secret prayer'): 'And the Lord, the God of the powerful Joseph, the Most High, hates all those who revere the idols, because He is a jealous God and frightening for all those revering alien gods'.

[52] *J & A*, 7.1, see Burchard (1985) 210 points out that the information is the reversal of *Gen*. 43.32.

according to Jewish perspective. In fact, while in the Hellenistic age Greek philosophies conceived of a unique superior divinity, Jews were considered as a people of philosophers for their faith in the God of the Patriarchs and Israel.[53]

The author of *J & A* might have been a Jewish intellectual active in the multi-cultural environment of Alexandria or the cities of Hellenistic/early-Roman Egypt. In the fragmentary works of the Jewish historian Artapanus biblical characters become protagonists of narratives similar to a novel. Indeed, according to Artapanus in Eusebius' testimony Abraham is the eponymous forefather of the Hebrew people, who went to Egypt and taught the Egyptians astrology before returning to Syria.[54] In the fragment about Joseph we read that Artapanus wrote a book *On the Jews*, and presented Joseph as Abraham's descendant and a son of Jacob.[55] Joseph's portrayal is unique for the blending of biblical tradition and invention: as he surpassed his brothers in intelligence and wisdom (συνέσει... καὶ φρονήσει), they were plotting against him; however, foreseeing their attack, he pleaded the neighbouring Arabs to bring him to Egypt. Artapanus adds that the Arabs complied with Joseph's request because they are grandchildren of Israel. It is noteworthy that Joseph is here presented as a prophet and a wise man in control of his destiny. In Egypt, Joseph becomes governor, and he starts dividing the whole land in lots, which he distributes to the priests; Joseph was also loved by the Egyptians for discovering and introducing measures. Artapanus informs in passing about Joseph's marriage to Aseneth, the daughter of a priest of Heliopolis, who gave him children. With an innovative technique, *J & A* is constructed as an ancient erotic novel, while the characters' deeds and events are loaded with religious significance. In Philo of Alexandria's exegetical treatises, the religious sense of the biblical narrative is conveyed through its allegorical explanation. The apparently plain and fairy-tale-like novel of *J & A* can be considered as a literary expression of Jewish culture in the Hellenistic world during the early Roman Empire. The identity of the Jewish

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[53] By way of example, the philosophers Theophrastus and Clearchus of Soli and the historian Megasthenes associated the Jews with other sages of the East, such as Indian priests and philosophers. Moses as the lawgiver of the Jews assumes particular importance in Hellenistic studies of political constitutions. See Boys-Stones 2001: 77, n. 1; Rajak 2009: 72-78.

[54] The fragment about Abraham is recorded in the testimony by Eusebius, in *Praeparatio Evangelica* , 9.18.1. Note that in Hellenistic testimonies the land of the Hebrews is often identified with Syria, as well as the language is defined as Syriac.

[55] Testimony in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 9.23.1-4.

philosopher and exegete in his contemporary cultural milieu has been subject for debate. Indeed, Philo can be representative of Jews in his time, or a *recherché,* an elitist exponent of upper-class Judaism.[56]

Likewise, *J & A* may be considered either as an example of popular literature, a novella, reflection of cultural expectations which were shared by Jews at the time of its composition, or as an *aggadic*-exegetical text, the work of a Jewish interpreter of Scripture, that was addressed to Jewish educated teachers. The rich reception of *J & A*, which has been copied and translated in later Christian environments, attests that the novel was favourably received, as well as reinterpreted in Christian perspective, like Philo's treatises. Indeed, Philo was especially valued by the Fathers who looked for a connection between Platonic-Hellenistic philosophy and religious doctrine, such as Clement and Origen in the early Alexandrian Church. Therefore, as David Runia remarked, Philo receives the appellatives *Judaeus*, indicating his loyalty to the Jewish tradition, *Alexandrinus*, meaning his intellectual use of Hellenistic philosophy and culture, and *Christianus*, an attribute that does not denote Philo as the man in his time, but points to his later identity as a Christian Father *honoris causa*, so to speak.[57] Unless one accepts that *J & A* was originally composed in a Christian milieu in the fourth-fifth centuries A.D., it is possible to surmise that the allegorical novel was adopted, preserved and re-interpreted in Christian tradition by scribes, illuminators and their audience in subsequent environments, such as the Eastern Churches.[58]

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[56]Cf. Sterling (1999).
[57] Runia (1993) 1-60; 350-428.
[58]See e. g. Inowlocki (2006) 831: 'a more secure approach may be to focus on the reception of pseudepigraphic literature in Christianity. Indeed, this is a fascinating story that stands on firmer ground.'

1.2.2 The Motifs of 'Change of Heart' and 'Confession' in *J & A* as a Clue to the Allegorical Method.

If Aseneth represented the exemplary Jewish proselyte at the time of the novel's composition and early transmission, *J & A* aimed to deal with the issue of accepting pagan converts in Jewish communities and mixed marriages between Jews by birth and alien ethnic groups. Thus, the remote biblical time was loaded with religious-ethical questions, significant in the Hellenistic world. For instance, the value of repentance (μετάνοια) corresponds to the classical philosophical concept of a 'change of heart'. In order to enact her mystical transformation, becoming acceptable to Joseph and his God, Aseneth delivers a confession (ἐξομολόγησις) to the Lord.[59] The term-concept of ἐξομολόγησις is not only used in title-forms of *J & A*, but it also occurs in the story, when the omniscient narrator informs that '… when Aseneth had ceased making confession to the Lord… the morning star rose out of heaven in the East.'[60] In the longer versions of *J & A*, the ritual of Aseneth's confession is repeated, when the heavenly messenger exhorts the heroine to take courage, because an emissary of God has heard the words of her confession and prayer.[61] Later theoretical definitions have identified in Christianity the concept of confession as the practice of opening one's soul or conscience to a spiritual guide.[62] However, the term was explained by the Jewish philosopher Philo through biblical paradigms in the first century A.D. In Philo's allegorical interpretation of the Hebrew patriarchs as figures of virtues Judah, son of Jacob and Leah, embodies the joyful rendering of praise to the Lord, as an incorporeal being which is related to symbolic elements, such as colours and stones woven on the robe of the High Priest:

> That he (Moses) is referring to these patriarchs he shows elsewhere when he says of the high-priestly garment… now Judah is engraved in the ruby, for he

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[59] In the index to the French critical edition of *J & A*, Philonenko records: μετανοέω: *J & A*, 9.2; 15.7; μετάνοια: *J & A*, 15.6; 15.7; 15.8; 16.7; ἐξομολογέομαι: *J & A*, 12. 4; 14.1; ἐξομολόγησις in a title and at *J & A*, 15.2.

[60] *J & A*, 14.1: καὶ ὡς ἐπαύσατο Ἀσενὲθ ἐξομολογουμένη τῷ κυρίῳ ἰδοὺ ὁ ἑωσφόρος ἀστὴρ ἀνέτειλεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατὰ ἀνατολᾶς.

[61] *J & A*, 15.2: θάρσει Ἀσενὲθ ἡ παρθένος ἁγνή. ἰδοὺ ἀκήκοα πάντων τῶν ῥημάτων τῆς ἐξομολογήσεώς σου καὶ τῆς προσευχῆς σου. The exhortation to 'take courage' was the typical formula of initiatory rites to mysteries, which indeed recurs in the Greek 'ideal novels'; cf. Joly's review of Merkelbach, Joly (1963) 160.

[62] See Foucault (1993).

> is fourth in order, and Issachar on the sapphire… Judah, the disposition prone to make confession of praise (ὁ ἐξομολογητικὸς τρόπος), is exempt from body and matter.[63]

In the allegory, Judah's analogue is Isaac, image of the self-taught nature and spiritual joy, while Issachar is positively contrasted as the active type of man able to enact good deeds:

> … therefore Judah is symbol of the disposition to confess… Issachar of the disposition to perform good deeds.
> … τοῦ μὲν οὖν ἐξομολογουμένου ὁ Ἰούδας σύμβολον… τοῦ δὲ ἐργαζομένου τὰ καλὰ ὁ Ἰσσάχαρ[64]

As a means to build the allegory, Philo offers the etymological explanation of the word:

> 'the very word denoting confession (of praise) vividly portrays the acknowledgment that takes a man out of himself'
> καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸ τοὔνομα τὸ τῆς ἐξομολογήσεως ἐμφαίνει τὴν ἐκτὸς ἑαυτοῦ ὁμολογίαν.

The significance of the mind that goes out of itself is the person's offer to God and the acceptance of His power, as in the case of Aseneth, at the beginning of the story arrogant and full of contempt, but soon prone to an inner conversion, in the ancient philosophical sense of a 'change of heart'. Aseneth's confession after two silent soliloquies in the long text is presented as awareness of her own change of heart and identity: 'And I, Aseneth, daughter of Pentephres the priest, the virgin and queen, who was once proud and arrogant…'[65] For the didactic purposes of the novel, Aseneth is transformed in Joseph's counterpart as soon as she acknowledges that everything depends on God. In the relevant passage of the treatise on the allegorical laws, Philo states that '… so long as the mind supposes itself to be the author of anything, it is far away from making room for God and from confessing or making acknowledgment to Him'; in fact '… we must take note that the very confession of praise itself is the work not of the soul but of God who gives it thankfulness'.[66] Interestingly, in the long texts of the novel, after the narrator retells Joseph and

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[63]Cf. *leg. All.* I.82: 'Incorporeal assuredly is Judah with his confession of praise', ἄυλος μὲν δὴ ὁ ἐξομολογούμενος Ἰούδας.
[64]*Leg. All.* I.80-82.
[65]*J & A*, 12.7.
[66]*Leg. All.* I.82.

Aseneth's marriage and the birth of Ephraim and Manasseh, Aseneth pronounces a Psalm to the Lord, which is introduced as a prayer and confession of thankfulness:

> καὶ τότε ἤρξατο Ἀσενὲθ ἐξομολογεῖσθαι κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐχαρίτωσε δεομένη ἐπὶ πᾶσιν οἷς ἠξίωται ἀγαθοῖς παρὰ κυρίου.
> And then Aseneth began to confess to the Lord and gave thanks, praying, for all the good (things) of which she was deemed worthy by the Lord.[67]

Philo also explains the meaning of confession as recognition of the divine essence:

> For whenever the mind goes out of itself and offers itself up to God, as Isaac or laughter does, then it makes confession of acknowledgment towards the Existent One (ὁμολογίαν τὴν πρὸς τὸν ὄντα ποιεῖται).

On the basis of these points of contact, it is feasible to read *J & A* as a Jewish narrative and exegetical text, which can be understood through Philo's exposition of the Mosaic Law. Moreover, the conceptual parallels with Philo seem to indicate that the notion of ἐξομολόγησις in the text of *J & A* can be as ancient as the first century A.D. The meaning of the word comes from Hellenistic Scripture, the source of *J & A* as well as the text which Philo of Alexandria interpreted. In the LXX, in fact, the verb ἐξομολογέομαι is attested in the meaning of 'expressing recognition, acknowledgment', orally and in public, often with appreciative-laudatory connotation.[68]

In Philo's allegorical imagery Issachar, because of the necessity to progress through labour (ἐκ πόνου), is provided with a material body (δεῖ καὶ ὕλης σωματικῆς).[69] Issachar is likened to a stone, a sapphire, so that its symbolic colour differs from Judah's colour. The red tone of the ruby, an attribute of Judah's, recalls the colour of wine and is related to the motif of the 'sober drunkenness', the inspiration in the pious' mind and the offering of worthy thoughts to God.

> To him who makes confession of praise the hue of the ruby belongs, for he is permeated by fire in giving thanks to God and is drunk with a sober

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[67] *J & A* 21.10.
[68] In Modern Greek the verb means 'to acknowledge, confess', but not 'to thank'.
[69] *Leg. All.* I.83. Issachar as figure of the active, material life is comparable to Jacob, image of the life of the ἀσκητής or προκοπτῶν; cf. *somn.* 1.150: Jacob's life is made of alternate vicissitudes, of which Castor and Pollux represent the paradigmatic image; in *Od.* xi.303, the Dioscuri live and die in alternate days, so that they both can partake of immortality.

drunkenness, πεπύρωται γὰρ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ θεοῦ καὶ μεθύει τὴν νήφουσαν μέθην.[70]

Metaphorical colour-materials in Philo's allegorical exegesis illustrate sacred concepts, which are ultimately contained in the figure of the High Priest, the embodiment of the divine Logos. In *J & A* the colours and interwoven fabrics of white linen, purple and hyacinth, find symbolic parallels only in descriptions of the Jewish Temple and in the robe of the High Priest. The motif of the 'sober libation', as it is exposed by Philo, might be encoded in the imagery of the bread of life, the cup of immortality and the ointment of incorruptibility of *J & A*. The symbolic value of the triad is difficult to pin down and insert in a Jewish religious-historical context. After her acceptance of the God of Israel, Aseneth does not partake of the three elements, but the confirmatory miracle of the honeycomb and bees substitutes the three means of wisdom and rescue.[71] The contrast between the positive elements and their counterparts is spelled out in Joseph's rhetorical speech to Aseneth and her household.

> And Joseph said: 'It is not fitting for a man who worships God, who will bless with his mouth the living God and eat blessed bread of life (ἄρτον εὐλογημένον ζωῆς) and drink a blessed cup of immortality (ποτήριον εὐλογημένον ἀθανασίας) and anoint himself with blessed ointment of incorruptibility (χρίσματι εὐλογημένῳ ἀφθαρσίας) to kiss a strange woman who will bless with her mouth dead and dumb idols and eat from their table bread of strangulation (ἄρτον ἀγχόνης) and drink from their libation a cup of insidiousness (ποτήριον ἐνέδρας) and anoint herself with ointment of destruction (χρίσματι ἀπωλείας).'[72]

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[70] Cf. νηφάλιος μέθη in *Opif.*, 71; *Leg. All.*, 3.82; *Mos.*, 1.187; *Prob.* 13. The expression 'sober drunkenness' becomes a symbolic motif in Philo; cf. Radice (2000) 172: in his commentary to the *Allegorical Laws* Radice points out that scholars attributed to the concept a symbolic value, so that it stands for divine grace; Radice remarks that the phrase was used as a *topos* by Philo, signifying metaphorical enthusiasm as well as hinting at 'the highest type of religious piety'; however, according to Radice Lewy went perhaps too far stating that the concept of *sober ebrietas* was adopted by Gnostics to define the pneumatic man, and transformed in a mystical category throughout early Christianity and up to Patristic.

[71] The white honeycomb in *J & A* has been interpreted as manna, bread from heaven, as in the book of Exodus, when Moses leads the people of Israel from Egypt; in Philo, God's grace is compared to the Olympians' nectar and ambrosia, whereas the manna is contrasted to cistern water, as 'unmixed draughts of intoxication', cf. *quod Deus sit immutabilis*, 155-158.

[72] *J & A*, 8.5. The symbolic elements are reiterated in Joseph's prayer of blessing for Aseneth: 'and let her eat your bread of life/and drink your cup of blessing … ποτήριον εὐλογίας', at *J & A*, 8.11.

A further conceptual parallel with Philo's exegesis can be seen in the heavenly messenger, Joseph's incorporeal counterpart. In fact, the man from heaven may stand for the divine Logos, because special importance is attributed to the words that are pronounced and the imagery of speech. The supernatural bees, bearing the same emblematic colours of the Temple and priestly garments, recall the motifs of wisdom, prophecy, chastity and soberness which were applied to bees and honey in antiquity. However, *J & A* hints at pagan knowledge in poly-semantic terms, which can be adapted according to different cultural backgrounds. Allegorical devices in *J & A* allow multiple readings. In order to understand how these literary features worked and were received in Hellenistic-Jewish environments, it is useful to refer to the rich production of the best known allegorical author in early first century A.D. Alexandria.

In this connection, John Dillon detected in Philo a system of consistent allegorizing constructions about Ganymede, Zeus' cup-bearer, as a figure of the Logos. The Alexandrian philosopher reinterprets Graeco-Roman mythical traditions through the lenses of a Jewish outlook. Thus Athena, traditionally paradigm of wisdom, receives the attributes of the Logos, is associated with the number seven, following the Pythagoreans, and is defined as 'the motherless and ever-virgin maiden.'[73] Aseneth in the novel is accompanied by seven maidens, beautiful as stars, who were born on the same day as the heroine, also a virgin endowed with superior wisdom as the story progresses. In addition, the motifs of 'repentance' or 'change of heart' and of 'confession' in *J & A* indicate crucial points for the interpretation of the novel. *Metanoia* is a word-concept related to a religious conversion, while also expressing a 'change of heart' in philosophical terms. From an analysis of the imagery that illustrates Aseneth's transformation and her taking part in Joseph's metaphorical tribe a connection emerges between the concept of *metanoia* and the symbolic elements recurring in *J & A*. Comparison with Philo of Alexandria's allegorical treatises show that both *metanoia* and *exomologēsis* were treated by means of allegorical imagery in first century A.D. Jewish culture.

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[73]See Dillon (1981); *Leg. All.*, 1.15, 'motherless victory and virgin'; *Opif.*, 100.

1.2.3 *J & A* and the Legend of the Septuagint Translation; Remarks on Jewish Ideology in the Hellenistic Age.

The use of the literary κοινὴ διάλεκτος in *J & A* and the prevalence of terms recurring in the Septuagint indicate the relation of the novel to Hellenistic Scripture, this pointing to a possible Hellenistic-Jewish cultural milieu of its provenance. According to narrative traditions it was in Alexandria, under the reign of king Ptolemy II Philadelphus, in the mid-second century B.C. (285-246), that the most renowned translation of the Hebrew Scripture into Greek took place. The event was celebrated in the framework of legends, which in subsequent centuries were upheld with remarkable variations testifying to different views on the historical-religious value of the Greek Bible. In the early Hellenistic era, Jewish authors purported that Greek translations of their hallowed Scripture already existed and circulated in the third century B.C. These accounts aimed to support the claim that the heritage of Moses, the wise lawgiver of the Hebrew people, preceded in time the knowledge of the Greek philosophers, and the superior depth of his thought was deemed to surpass the wisdom of other peoples, though learned in their cultures.[74]

The relation of *J & A* to the Septuagint posits further questions about its origins. In fact, the sixteen Greek manuscripts of *J & A* might represent the late witnesses to a tradition belonging in a more ancient historical background. Without earlier documents attesting the origins of the novel, such as papyri and indirect testimonies, scholars still have to rely on linguistic analysis and comparative studies in order to ascertain the novel's erstwhile cultural setting. Philonenko, in the introduction to his monograph, remarked that the text which has been rendered in modern editions is based on the extant witnesses to the transmission of lost archetypal texts. In Philonenko's opinion, it was possible to reconstruct different layers of *J & A*, but not its original text.[75] The shorter version must have been the oldest and the most similar to the archetypal novel, which was composed in the

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[74]See Eupolemus, in the testimony of Alexander Polyhistor, in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 9. 26.1: 'And Eupolemus says that Moses was the first wise man, that he first taught the alphabet to the Jews, and the Phoenicians received it from the Jews, and the Greeks received it from the Phoenicians, and that Moses first wrote laws for the Jews' (transl. by Fallon in *OTP*, vol. 2); cf. the argument in Boys-Stones (2001) 77, n. 2.

[75]Philonenko (1968) 20-21.

environment of Greek-speaking Judaism, like the Egyptian Diaspora.[76] While the authorial identity of *J & A* was still debated, Philonenko stated that the anonymous author had to be an assiduous reader of the Septuagint.[77]

The influence of the Septuagint on the Greek of *J & A* is indicated in recurrent expressions, which are attested as typical formulae of the Hellenistic Bible. Thus, following Philonenko's list, it is possible to record: καὶ ἐγένετο (*J & A* 3.1; 11.1; 22.1; 23.1); καὶ ἰδού (5.1; 10.18; 13.8; 14.3; 14.8; 15.9; 16.5; 23.4; 26.8; 28.8); εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον (4.10; 6.8; 15.7; 17.5); ὁ παράδεισος τῆς τρυφῆς (16.8); ἐχάρε χαρὰν μεγάλην (3.4; 4.2; 7.10; 9.1; 15.12; 24.5); προσεκύνησαν τῷ Ἰωσὴφ ἐπὶ πρόσωπον ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν (5.10); ἐφοβήθη φόβον μέγαν (6.1). The turns of phrase reveal modes of a religious translation, aimed at respecting the original Hebrew wording. In *J & A* the use of the same turns of phrase, while pointing to the cultural background of the novel signify the rendering of philosophical thought and religious beliefs by means of adapting Scriptural language. If the anonymous author referred to the Hellenistic translation of the Bible, like Philo of Alexandria, Josephus and their predecessors Artapanus and Aristobulus, the cultural dimension in which the novel appealed to an audience with its underlying meanings was Diaspora Judaism in the centuries at the turn of the era. Indeed the presence of inter-textual allusions to biblical passages constitutes a valuable argument to support a Jewish intended audience and readership for *J & A*. Obviously, literary analyses do not constitute strong evidence for the selective reception of the novel within a Jewish community. Moreover, the presence of vocabulary that is attested in the later Jewish translations of Aquila and Symmachus, and of the New Testament, points to the relation of *J & A* to later forms of Greek Scripture in the first-early second centuries A.D. At this time the earlier Greek novels were circulating and the author of *J & A*, if he was a Hellenised Jew, might have been exposed to Christianity.

The place of composition of *J & A* also remains a subject for discussion. Since the conquests of Alexander the Great, Jews benefited from a privileged social status

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[76] However, Burchard remarked that Hellenistic culture entered in Palestine and Babylonia as well. Burchard (1985) 181.
[77] Philonenko (1968) 30.

in Alexandria and important cities of Egypt, such as Heliopolis and Leontopolis; their social status in the Hellenistic age was superior to that of native Egyptians, and equal to that of the Hellenes. It is most likely that the author of *J & A* intended to portray a multicultural environment, in which different ethnic groups possess wisdom and dignity to various degrees. As a literary work that was transmitted and possibly composed throughout so long a span of time, *J & A* cannot offer in itself the ground to reconstruct an historical background. Conflicts among groups that are depicted in the novel might be narrative devices pregnant with additional ethical-religious teachings, and not a faithful chronicle of contemporary social tensions.[78] Even the seemingly technical-ritual terms which are employed to define characters, such as 'a man who worships God' (θεοσεβής), 'son of God', consistently attributed to Joseph, must have assumed a different meaning throughout subsequent centuries.

The story of the Hellenistic version of Scripture constitutes a fascinating, but obviously complex topic in itself: was it a literary text, reminiscent of the cultivated language of Theocritus, Callimachus and Apollonius of Rhodes? The five narrative books of the Torah or Pentateuch, the first to be translated, were followed by the Psalms and the Prophets. The stylistic level of the Septuagint reveals a Greek closer to documentary papyri that is non-literary testimonies, and close to the spoken language. Turns of phrase characteristic of Hebrew, concepts and loan-words that are transposed in Greek, have been interpreted as clues attesting that the translation was produced by Greek-speaking Jews of middle-class environment, such as soldiers at the service of the royal house.[79] According to narrative traditions, the work was commissioned by the enlightened sovereign Ptolemy II Philadelphus, on suggestion

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[78]See e.g. Chessnutt (1988): in this earlier article, antecedent to the monographic book on the theme of conversion in *J & A*, Chessnutt distinguished a literary level and a socio-cultural representation in the narrative. The thrust of the novel, according to his insight, was to address Jews living in dynamic tension with Gentiles in a multicultural world, in order to reinforce their awareness of cultural identity. Cf. also Chessnutt (1995).

[79]This conclusion comes from the literary analysis of the LXX according to Joosten (2006): the Hellenistic translation of Scripture was not commissioned by Ptolemy II, nor accomplished to please the king and enrich the Library of Alexandria, as the legend purports; rather, the earlier Greek version of sacred texts was meant to be a useful tool to allow middle-class, Greek-speaking Jews to access the holy books. The simple, plain style of the LXX is attested in Origen's comment in *Contra Celsum*, 7.59, and through the evidence of Aquila's later version, which seems not only to render more faithfully the Hebrew text, but also to improve the literary style.

of the learned librarian Demetrius of Phaleron. The *Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates* records the event in the guise of a fictitious chronicle, which is reported by an allegedly pagan witness. The task was undertaken by Seventy-two Hebrew sages, six for each of the twelve tribes of Israel, who were summoned from Palestine to Alexandria and the Island of Pharos to accomplish their historical mission. Aristeas, the first-person narrator, is a literary persona, who claims to be, with Andreas, one of the Greek ambassadors sent by the king Ptolemy II to the High Priest of Jerusalem, Eleazar, to ask him for a parchment containing the original Hebrew Scriptures.[80] The literary choice to entrust to an allegedly pagan spectator the task of speaking about Jewish culture in respectful tone is instructive: even as objective a witness as an emissary of the royal court of Alexandria understood the necessity and epochal importance of the translation. Therefore, the account is presented as most reliable, indicating the existence at the same time of cultural interrelations among ethnic groups in Hellenistic Alexandria as well as in Palestine.

If the translation was commanded by the enlightened king of Egypt, it is supposed to be written in an elevated literary style, suggestive of the contemporary cultural milieu of Hellenistic Alexandria, well-known for its Library and the accurate work of philologists and scribes. On the contrary, as already noted the use of *koinè* Greek in the Hellenistic Bible is characterized by a literal paraphrase of the original Hebrew wording, and apparently attests a composition by fairly literate Jews, perhaps soldiers at the service of the king, who were bearing in mind a Jewish audience.[81] According to this opinion, the Jewish community in Alexandria needed a translation of sacred Scripture because Greek was the language currently in use, which to a certain extent had replaced Hebrew even in the religious practice of the

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[80]The anecdote is meant to testify to the authenticity of the translation: if the original scroll was deposited in the Library in Alexandria, the Greek translation was the faithful version of the divine word; cf. Honigman (2007).

[81]E. g. Joosten (2006) envisions a modest cultural milieu of origin for the LXX, surmising that the translation was composed by soldiers at the service of the king, therefore belonging in the Jewish 'middle classes', rather than being bilingual translators proficient in both Aramaic and Greek. It should also be pointed out that Aramaic was the Semitic language in use among cultural groups in the Second Temple period (i.e. after the return from the Babylonian exile in 538 B.C. until the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans, in 70 A.D.), and indeed to Aramaic the *Letter* refers with the attribute of 'Syriac', through the words of the librarian Demetrius; cf. *Let.Ar.* 11. Biblical Hebrew was not a language actually spoken, and was indeed different from both Aramaic and the variety of Hebrew used for teaching purposes by the Pharisees and the rabbis; see Janse (2002) 338-339.

synagogue.[82] A similar discussion of authorship and intended audience pertains to *J & A*: on the basis of its language, biblical subject-matter, inter-textual references and the knowledge of the Joseph-story that is presupposed in the reader, the novel was composed by a Greek-speaking Jew addressing his community.

Gideon Bohak formulated the hypothesis that the author was a Jewish soldier who served in the army of the king Ptolemy VI Philomethor (180-145 B.C.), the benefactor of the Jewish people in Egypt, at the time of the Jewish Temple in Leontopolis. The Temple was built when Onias IV, exponent of a priestly family, fled from Jerusalem during violent rivalries of power to find refuge in the Ptolemaic kingdom. Bohak interpreted the scene of the encounter between Aseneth and the heavenly visitor as the key to understand the significance of *J & A*. The mysterious honeycomb, full of uncommon bees that swarm out obeying to the divine man's gestures and words, stands for the Jerusalem Temple. The bees, bearing emblematic features, crowns and a sharp sting, represent priests, endowed with royal-military and sacred power, the pillars upon which the symbolic nation of Israel is founded. In fact, the colours of the bees correspond to descriptions of the Temple, as in the pseudepigraphical *Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates*, in Philo of Alexandria and Josephus.[83] In his historical account Josephus records that Ananias, Onias IV's son and successor at the service of Ptolemy VIII Physcon and his wife Cleopatra III, declined support from his kingdom during an attempt to subdue the Hasmonean authority in Jerusalem. Josephus emphasizes the loyalty of the Jewish community in the 'Land of Onias' towards the religious centre in Palestine. The novel of *J & A* may thus be read as the allegorical account of a contemporary historical event, which is featured in the guise of a prophecy, set in the mythical time of the patriarchs.[84]

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[82]In fact, the influence of Hebrew language on the LXX is due to a specific translation technique, typical of religious texts; thus, the language of the LXX can be defined a 'good κοινή Greek', as demonstrated by Janse (2002) 388-390.

[83]See e. g. Philo of Alexandria, *leg. All.*, 1.80-82: 'That he (*sc.* Moses) is referring to these patriarchs (*sc.* Judah and Issachar, emblems of the priestly and royal powers) he shows elsewhere when he says of the high-priestly garment, -And you shall weave together in it precious stones in fourfold order: there shall be a row of precious stones, sardius, topaz, smaragdus, making the one row-Reuben, Simeon and Levi-and the second row –it says- ruby and sapphire… Now Judah is engraved in the ruby, for he is fourth in order, and Issachar on the sapphire.'

[84]Bohak (1993), (1996): the interpretative key to understand *J & A* is the emblematic scene of the heroine's encounter with the angel and the miracle of the honeycomb and bees; the thesis is supported by learned references to the scriptural text, in particular the prophecy of Isaiah 19, which presents the image of the 'City of righteousness'.

However, the narrative lacks evident anachronisms, while containing archaic terms and typical expressions of the LXX.

The Greek version of Scripture had a strong cultural impact on Jewish literary production in the Hellenistic and early Roman age. Historians like Demetrius the Chronographer, Aristeas the Exegete, Artapanus and Josephus drew on its text to create narrative expansions of Jewish history. Philo of Alexandria and his now fragmentary predecessor Aristobulus added exegetical commentaries to the biblical episodes, borrowing at the same time from the language and concepts of the Greek philosophers.[85] Jewish-Hellenistic texts convey notions of cultural identity, which combined the concept of belonging in an elected group with the knowledge, appropriation and reinterpretation of Hellenic cultural expression. Thus, in the illustrative mode of the novel the Pharaoh can represent a paradigm of pagan wisdom, being 'like a father for Joseph'[86] and the one who has the right to celebrate the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth, in Jacob's absence. Indeed, the 'literary function' of Pharaoh as a character is to confer solemnity to the event. The prohibition of work during the wedding celebrations, which is intimated to all the subjects of the land by threat of death penalty for transgressors, represents a rhetorical device that sanctions the religious value of the event. Accordingly, wise and tolerant Pharaoh may be the literary figure of an enlightened king of Egypt, one of the Ptolemies, favourable to the Jewish people, their ancient lore enshrined in sacred Scripture and their religious practices. Pharaonic imagery was in fact employed as one of the symbolic representations of Ptolemaic royalty.

The *Letter of Aristeas* portrays a world in which Greeks living in Egypt and Jews from Palestine come to encounter and exchange wise thoughts. During the seven-day banquet that is recorded in the Letter, the king Ptolemy II inquires the seventy-two sages about ethical principles and virtues. In the relevant section, which is built up with the method of questions and answers, characteristic of Philo's

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[85] Cf. Aristobulus' testimony on the translation, frag. 3, in Eusebius, 13.12. 1f: 'But the entire translation of all the (books) of the Law (was made) in the time of the king called Philadelphus, your ancestor. He brought greater zeal (to the task than his predecessors), while Demetrius Phalereus managed the undertaking' (transl. by Yarbro Collins in the *OTP*, vol. 2).

[86] See e. g. *J & A*, 20.9 (7): Joseph politely declines Pentephres's offer to celebrate the marriage, because Pharaoh is like his father and appointed him chief administrator of the realm of Egypt.

treatises and early rabbinical tracts, a handbook for the ideal politician emerges.[87] The Letter has to be regarded as a work of literary fiction rather than as a testimony of the overall view of Judaism in the Hellenistic age. In fact, all its characters undertake a literary function. King Ptolemy, authorizing the translation, solemnly confers trustworthiness on the Greek Scripture while Demetrius, the famous librarian from Athens, through 'reading out' the translation to the crowd, emblematically makes the work 'canonical', as it is remarked in the subsequent injunction 'not to add nor remove anything' from the sacred books. The Jewish religious precept is rooted in normative scriptural passages, and significantly conveyed in fiction by a Greek personage. The anathema highlights the religious value of the story and may be analogous to the Pharaoh's injunction about work during the wedding feast of Joseph and Aseneth.[88]

From the considerations above, it seems that *J & A* is not only constructed on the selected passages of the biblical Joseph-story, thus constituting a particular example of 'rewritten Bible'; indeed, the novel conveys a religious ideology analogous to the outlook expressed in Jewish Hellenistic texts such as the *Letter of Aristeas*. It is noteworthy that Jewish commentators quote the Septuagint *lato sensu*, with the purpose of expressing the ideologies significant in their contemporary time.[89] The anonymous author(s) of *J & A* intended to guide the readers on the lines of the biblical exegesis, implicitly hinting at the historical and religious value of the narrative by means of rhetorical devices. Interestingly, both accurate quotes from the Joseph story in *Genesis* and citations *lato sensu* from the biblical source are combined in the novel. For instance, *Isaiah* may have inspired the image of Aseneth as a City of Refuge, while the overall vision of Egypt in the same prophetic book might constitute a foundation-text for *J & A*. In fact, common themes are explored and reinterpreted in the novel: the weakness and eventual defeat of the Egyptian idols in front of the God of Israel, internal conflicts for the Egyptians within their own

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[87]Letter of Aristeas, 187-194.
[88] *J & A*, 21.8.
[89]Cf. Inowlocki (2005) 48: Inowlocki analyses Jewish, Greek and Latin texts dealing with the issue of translation and the interpretation process; the authors she considers are Josephus, Aristobulus, Plato, Cicero, Porphyry and the author of the XVI treatise of the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

cities, awe and fear of the Jewish people and their God.[90] The prophecy in Isaiah's vision seems to be re-elaborated in the novel's narrative plot. For instance, Aseneth decides to reject all the Egyptian deities as 'dead and dumb idols', and the graphic scene of her breaking the statues into pieces, throwing them from the window, seem to depict in the framework of the novel-like story a subversion of the established religious-cultural system. In the story of *J & A*, before her confession and marriage to Joseph, Aseneth represented an object of desire, a cause of strife and contention among men. The motif of a beautiful woman's renown, which has antecedents in the Homeric poems and is developed in Egyptian tales and the Hellenistic romance, is loaded with an allegorical value: Aseneth passes from being a haughty lady and perhaps a representation of an isolated city internally divided by strife to a unifying Jewish ideal, a City of Refuge.

Therefore, like *Isaiah J & A* represents a contrast between Jewish wisdom and virtues and Egyptian-pagan idolatry, violence and immorality. It is noteworthy that behind Jewish values and lore looms the ideology of Hellenic education or *paideia* in Jewish-Hellenistic texts such as *J & A* and the *Letter of Aristeas*. If we return to the *Letter*, in fact, we shall see that Aristeas recounts as a first person narrator how he supported the release of all the Jewish slaves in Egypt by means of a rhetorical speech to the king of Egypt: 'These people worship God the overseer and creator of all, whom all men worship including ourselves, O King, except that we have a different name. The primitive men, consistently with this, demonstrated that the one by whom all live and are created is the master and Lord of all.'[91] The description of the Jewish creed is in line with the attitude of those Greek sages who, like Theophrastus, defined the Jews as a people of philosophers, on account of their belief in a superior and transcendent divinity;[92] thus natural law, which existed since times immemorial, is deemed to attest the antiquity and reliability of religious thought. By relating Greek and Jewish belief, the statement of the *Letter* suggests that in the

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[90]*Isaiah*, 19.1: 'and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and their heart shall faint within them'; 19. 2: 'And the Egyptians shall be stirred up against the Egyptians: and a man shall fight against his brother, and a man against his neighbour, city against city, and law against law'; 19.3: 'and they shall enquire of their gods and their images…'

[91]Letter of Aristeas, 16 (transl. by Shutt, in *OTP*, vol. 2).

[92]Theophrastus of Eresus, Aristotle's disciple and successor, whose philosophical work 'On Piety' was quoted in Porphyry, 'On Abstinence', and reported by Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 9. 2; v. Mélèze Modrzejewski (1995²) 49.

Hellenistic age the traditional distinction between pagan polytheism and the monotheistic Jewish faith was not conceived in so strict a way as it was posited in later theological constructions.

Formal disapproval of polytheism, in the *Letter of Aristeas* and Jewish-Hellenistic writings, such as *J & A* itself, involves the argument against the defilement of alien rituals, which are avoided by the Jews for the commandment of their 'particular laws'.[93] Greek myths, with their deities, heroes and paradigmatic stories, are envisaged as constitutive of Greek education, the *paideia* that became complementary to the religious laws for Jews living in the Hellenistic world, and a still imperfect stage in the progression towards the wisdom of the Hebrew ancestors.[94] The laws of purity which the High Priest Eleazar enumerates in the *Letter* concern the significance attributed by Jews to animals, some considered worth of being elected victims for sacrifices, others avoided as contaminated. The explanation of these symbols, encoded in living creatures, thus in reality, can be quoted as the evidence of the allegorical method observed in the literary work. For instance, all animals with cloven hoofs represent in that feature the positive separation between the Jewish people and different ethnic groups; the weasel, on the other hand, signifies a negative quality, being the image of a wrong, immoral use of language, as in the case of informers.[95]

Allegorical readings and the rationalization of Jewish particular religious precepts have been interpreted by modern scholars as the evidence of a Jewish universalistic outlook in the Hellenistic age. By means of the rhetorical figure of

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[93]But cf. the criticism of pagan practices in *LetAr.* 137-138, in the words of the High Priest, Eleazar: 'Those who have invented these fabrications and myths are usually ranked to be the wisest of the Greeks. There is surely no need to mention the rest of the very foolish people, Egyptians and those like them, who have put their confidence in beasts and most of the serpents and monsters, worship them, and sacrifice to them both alive and dead'.

[94]Examples of the graded path towards wisdom and virtue can be multiplied analysing Philo of Alexandria's treatises; in the story of Abraham's journey the hero's father, Terah, could not go further the land of Haran; historical information is explained allegorically by Philo in philosophical terms: Terah, who embodies the philosophy of the Greeks, could not go beyond the knowledge of his soul that is, the human reason, being the counterpart of Socrates and the self-knowledge that is based on sense-perception; v. *Abr.*, 72; *De Mig.*, 176; *De Som.*, 1.41.

[95] A subtle hint to unscrupulous actions in political life can be seen here. For the weasel, see *Let.Ar.* 166-168, in which Aristeas shows to his interlocutor, the High Priest Eleazar, that he has understood the symbolic significance of the weasel. It was held in antiquity that the weasel conceived from the ears and bore its offspring from the mouth; cf. Ar. *de gen. an.*, iii.756 b.15, where the theory is scientifically refuted as erroneous, and explained by the fact that the mother often carries its tiny young ones in its mouth.

allegory, Philo of Alexandria and the writer of the *Letter* aimed to promote their system of religious beliefs, conveying a positive, constructive message to an ideally mixed audience of Jews and not Jews.[96] A universalistic concept of Judaism is therefore expressed by means of philosophical tenets, thus contributing to the rich and complex Hellenistic culture, while making more challenging the task to identify the historical background of ancient authors and their anticipated readership. In fact, Hellenistic Jews not only mastered Greek language and expressed cultural perspectives in Greek, but they also conceived of themselves as Hellenes as well as the heirs of Moses the lawgiver.

Moreover, the analysis of the *Letter of Aristeas* seems to demonstrate that the translation of Hebrew Scripture into Greek was not requested by the Jewish community in Alexandria. As Nina Collins has argued, passages in the *Letter* subtly hint at the Jewish disagreement with a Greek version of Scripture. The High Priest Eleazar is the literary spokesperson of this resistance: although Eleazar consents to give the original scroll containing the Law to the translators, he also maintains in his (fictitious) letter to Ptolemy II that the rendering of the Pentateuch into Greek is 'unnatural' (εἰ παρὰ φύσιν ἐστίν), therefore the Jews will accomplish it only to fulfil the sovereign's desire (σοι γένηται καθὼς προαιρῇ), and the translation itself will be carried out according to the king's command (σοι συμφερόντως), thus implicitly remarking that the Jews did not endorse the translation of their own initiative.[97] Collins has attributed the contrasting opinions about the translation on the Jewish part to the presence of two layers in a section of the *Letter* (§ 308-311), and to the addition of further interpolations that stress the validity of the translation and can be detected in the text.

On the basis of the allegorical patterns embedded in the *Letter*, however, these statements may be the result of a dialectic dynamic between the literal sense of the narrative and its deeper significance that is, between the descriptive level and more complex symbols. In similar paradigmatic terms texts of the Hellenistic period expressed the tension between Jewish particularism, which should have restricted the

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[96]Birnbaum (2003) esp. 310-314.
[97]Collins (2000) 123, referring to *LetAris*. 44-45.

access to the source of religious faith to those able to understand the significance of the divinely-inspired word, and the universalistic tendency to promote Jewish knowledge and worldviews. In conclusion, points of contact between the *Letter* and *J & A* can be identified in the fictional framework of these literary testimonies that is, in the roles which the characters undertake, in the time of the story and in descriptions of the symbolic landscape that constitutes a substantial part of both narratives.

1. 3 Jewish *Paideia* in the Patriarchs' Stories according to Philo of Alexandria. *Interpretatio Iudaica* of Hellenic Culture?

Historical events might have promoted the rise of traditions like *J & A*. In fact, the Hellenistic age saw political-territorial boundaries becoming more tenuous in the Mediterranean and the Near East. As a means of expressing religious beliefs and philosophical tenets, texts could partake of this intercultural trend, conveying shared values, knowledge and motifs. Therefore, *J & A* can be defined as a Hellenistic novel not only for its formal devices, such as its structural frame, but also and more importantly for its role as an intermediary text, at the crossroads between Hellenistic and Jewish civilizations. Interrelated contacts existed between Greece and the Ancient Near East since archaic times. In the Hellenistic era, when communications were enhanced by the conquests of Alexander the Great and by the creation of Hellenistic kingdoms by his successors, the Hellenic influence on other cultural groups, such as the Jews, became a widespread, deep-rooted phenomenon. Hellenistic culture involved mastering Classical literature, such as the Homeric poems, Attic tragedy, and philosophy. In Hellenistic cities where Jewish communities of the Diaspora lived, Jews were deeply Hellenised, however Jewish intellectual activity still existed in Palestine.[98] Thus, a contrast between Hellenic culture as scientific-philosophical knowledge and Jewish religion, which is supposedly characterized by faith and belief in divine intervention in history, turns

[98]The topic, which can still be debated, was explored in 1974 by Martin Hengel in his classical work, *Judaism and Hellenism*. Hengel in Collins-Sterling (2001) 6-29 argued that his pioneering book must be revisited, but not revised; one of the fundamental theses of his study is the statement that Hellenistic culture deeply influenced Palestinian as well as Diaspora Judaism.

out to be a fictitious stereotype.[99] In Philo of Alexandria's writings it is possible to recognize the dialectic between Jewish thought and Hellenistic ideology. A similar cultural blending can be detected in *J & A*, but the novel's ideology is embedded in its narrative-rhetorical devices.

Jewish writers in the Hellenistic age referred to Scripture and the historical past of Israel as the sacred lore of their nation.[100] The LXX made the word of God accessible to Greek-speaking Jews and possibly to their pagan neighbours, so that the scriptural texts were read, quoted and commented. The Greek version of the Mosaic Law is regarded in Hellenistic treatises as a homogeneous corpus of writings that compose the Jewish holy books. But conceptions of holiness and canonicity varied in time. Jewish authors conceived of a close canon of Scripture from the second century A.D. In fact, narrative, poetical or historical texts which were later considered as apocrypha or pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, such as the books of the Maccabees, Esther and possibly *J & A* itself, were originally read as historical holy books, engaging with recent events in the history of the Jews or with variant interpretations of biblical stories. Literary testimonies of Jewish culture from the Hellenistic to the Judeo-Christian time can be considered as Graeco-Roman texts on account of linguistic features, conventions and rhetorical modes.[101] From the second-third century A.D. the world of Hellenism changed: Jewish educated writers replaced Greek with difficult, literary forms of Hebrew and Aramaic to convey religious doctrine, while the Christian outlook transformed the cultural climate of Hellenism. Indeed, the thrust of early-Christian writers changed with historical conditions, but

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[99]Niehoff (1999) 32: the concepts of Hellenism and Judaism have long been contrasted on account of opposite connotations that is, Hellenism as 'rationality, aesthetics and universal humanism', as opposed to a Judaism of 'faith, revealed ethics, and national particularism', represent an assumption which has its roots in early-Christian theology, 'which defined the church as a perfect synthesis of these supposed opposites'.

[100]Goodman (1992) 54: sometime before the Hellenistic period, Jews accepted that other people could join their communities, adopting their customs, rites and cultic laws; on the contrary, Greek culture was very much linked to city-states: 'like Romans but unlike Greeks, Jews accepted the notion that their *politeia* was not fixed to any particular locality'.

[101]The cultural milieu which is defined as Judeo-Christianity attests the presence of Christians still bound to their traditional Jewish origins, cults, mentality; this tendency led to the later conception of Jews contending with Christians to gain proselytes, according to Goodman (1992) 55.

an ongoing, if tense, dialogue between Jewish, Christian and pagan thinkers still existed as intellectual debate.[102]

In Jewish-Hellenistic writings biblical figures are presented as ethical paradigms: with their heroic deeds, the Patriarchs embodied the Law, ancestral wisdom and Hellenistic virtues. Less known female characters and new heroines, such as Aseneth, Esther, Judith and Susannah, become part of historical-novelistic writings related to the Septuagint. Texts of Jewish origins in the Egyptian Diaspora elevated Joseph as a symbol of just royalty and prosperity in the land.[103] In fact, Joseph was portrayed as an ethical model in Jewish narratives whereas in early Christian literature he became a typological image of Christ.[104] The fragmentary *History of Joseph* contains significant points of contact with *J & A*. On the basis of the extant text, the narrative appears to follow the biblical Joseph-story, with its references to Joseph's rule in Egypt as well as to the encounter between Joseph and his brothers. The hero is called a king, βασιλεύς, the one who provided food for the Egyptians, therefore a saviour. As scholars have remarked, Joseph's attributes of king, provider of food, and saviour occur together in a single line of *J & A*.[105]

Narratological analyses of *J & A* have pointed out that the figure of Joseph in the novel is static, as if the hero were a stereotyped character. Indeed, the son of God the Most High and of Jacob-Israel has no need to undertake a dynamic process of transformation, having achieved the acme of wisdom and upright authority in Egypt. Joseph's attributes and gestures are described in detailed pictures, while the narrative pace decreases. Therefore, novelistic scenes illustrate values, such as the virtue of firmness, which were recognized both in Jewish and in pagan Hellenistic environments. Along the same lines, Joseph's words may sound peremptory because

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[102]Lieu (1992) 86: Origen and Jerome, as well as Eusebius, maintained contacts with Jewish teachers, and they were indebted to them for the exegesis of Scripture.

[103] Not only literary, but also epigraphic testimonies contain information about the use of personal classical/mythological names that are loaded with 'powerful symbolic associations', according to Swain (1996) 96 and n. 87: Hebrew Patriarchal names were used in Egypt before the Trajanic revolt.

[104] See e. g. Argyle, Rev. (1955-1956).

[105]*J & A*, 25.6, καὶ ἔστι σήμερον βασιλεύς πάσης τῆς γῆς Αἰγύπτου καὶ σωτὴρ καὶ σιτοδότης... as pointed out by Zervos (1985) in *OTP*, 470; cf. *HJ* : βασιλεύς A recto 16; A verso 28; ἐφάνη τροφεύς A recto 23, σώζειν A recto 10, cf. Gen. 47.25. A significant point of contact is also the recurring phrase 'the God of Joseph' in *HJ* B verso 11 and B recto 9, as in *J & A* 3.4: κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰωσὴφ; 6.4, Ἰωσὴφ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστὶ. For these considerations, cf. Dochhorn-Petersen (1999) esp. 432-433 and quotation in Docherty (2004) 44 n. 39.

his ethical consciousness never sways in the novel, and indeed traditional mildness is credited to the forefather from the biblical account.[106] The literary position of *J & A* among post-biblical narratives can be evaluated through the analysis of Philo of Alexandria's stories of the Patriarchs. In fact, traditions about Aseneth might have originated in Hellenistic Egypt so that its text(s) still witness to the Greek-speaking Jewish dispersion, in the multi-cultural environment of Alexandria or Hellenistic cities of Egypt and the ancient Near East. In addition, the framework of *J & A* seems to represent on a smaller scale a plan similar to Philo's exegetical fiction, in which biblical episodes offer the starting point to create new stories, significant in the authors' contemporary time.

Starting from the biblical narrative, *J & A* recounts an original story about the Hebrew patriarchs in Egypt, making a less known female character, the Egyptian Aseneth, the heroine of a novel that contains elements of love and adventure. If this was a programmatic choice on the part of a Jewish author, *J & A* might attest that the novelistic genre was a popular literary form, likely to be well received by various Greek-speaking cultures, such as Diaspora Jews in the Hellenistic age. As the previous sections have anticipated, the present chapter attempts to evaluate the genre of *J & A* as an eclectic literary form between the Hellenistic pagan novel, Jewish narratives and the Jewish-Alexandrian exegesis of Scripture. In the following paragraphs *J & A* is analysed synoptically, wherever possible, with Philo of Alexandria's exegetical commentaries in order to specify the novel's function as 'rewritten Bible' and a commentary on Scripture. In fact, I shall argue that *J & A* is featured as an allegorical narrative, which also contains a subtle philosophical pattern and a lofty idea of religion.[107] Points of contact between the novel and exegetical-philosophical treatises provide additional knowledge of the Jewish culture in the Hellenistic age. *J & A* may be considered as an independent Jewish-Hellenistic novel, although the motifs embedded in its plot testify to an interconnection with the

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[106] E. g. *J & A*, 8.9, when Joseph feels pity in front of Aseneth's tears, and starts his prayer to God in favour of her new life: Καὶ εἶδεν αὐτὴν Ἰωσὴφ καὶ ἠλέησεν αὐτὴν σφόδρα, ὅτι ἦν Ἰωσὴφ πρᾶος καὶ ἐλεήμων καὶ φοβούμενος τὸν κύριον.

[107] Cf. Burrus (2005): she identifies these features as points of contact between *J & A* and Heliodorus, referring to male virginity in *J & A* and Achilles Tatius' novel as well as to disruption of traditional customs in the ancient city should women, such as Thecla in the *Acta Pauli*, challenge the establishment and undertake control over their religious-social status.

Graeco-Roman novels. It is likely that *J & A* represented a variation on the novelistic genre, which merged a Hellenistic literary form with an originally Jewish outlook and the language of the Septuagint, the Greek version of Scripture. In that sense, *J & A* is a unique case of a Jewish narrative containing features of a pagan novel.

According to Philo's authorial program and later classifications of the treatises, the lives of the patriarchs constitute an introduction to the exposition of the Law of Moses, which comes after the allegorical commentary. The biographical treatises, which recount the heroic deeds of biblical ancestors, founders of Israel, contain plenty of fiction.[108] Narrative-historical texts are called in Hebrew *aggada*, which is complementary to the *halakah*, the legislative tradition that means literally 'the way' to reach the knowledge of the Law. The literary form of *midrash*, narrative commentary on the sacred texts, which is used to convey philosophical ideas and theological truths, is also ascribed to Philo of Alexandria. The present analysis aims to outline Philo's system of thought as it is represented in the Hebrew patriarchs' stories. Indeed, the life of Abraham, the first patriarch, introduces the book of Genesis. The title of the book, 'Genesis' means 'creation' and starts from the divine creation of the world. The ancestral time is measured through the rise and fall of successive generations.

> … for it (*sc.* Genesis) tells of peace and war, of fruitfulness and barrenness, of dearth and plenty....[109]

Thus, on the basis of the same dualistic pattern, human lives which are recorded in the book of Genesis are distinguished in those characterized by virtue and those corrupted with vice. The plot of *J & A* is constructed on a similar opposition. The first part of the novel is set in the time of plentiful harvest, when Joseph is collecting crops. Adventures in the second part of *J & A* take place during the biblical time of famine, when Jacob and his sons migrate to the land of Goshen. The symbolic time of the story in *J & A* implies that the novel follows the biblical account, and may be devised as a reflection of the natural order, by means of symbolic contrasted terms. The imaginary language of the novel presents in fact the opposition between

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[108]This is clarified by Cohen (1995) 14-15.
[109]*Abr.*, 1.1. These contrasting categories recur in Philo's treatises, often with a symbolic value in the explanation that draws on the biblical narrative.

elements of light, life and truth, and their opposites that is emblematic darkness, death, corruption and deceit.

1.3.1 Symbolic Significance of Time and Use of Chronological Indicators in Philo and *J & A*.

The macro-structure of the novel of *J & A* is built on the two verses of *Genesis* that mention Aseneth as the daughter of the priest of Heliopolis and mother of Ephraim and Manasseh. In addition, the chronological frame of the narrative and its twofold plot are related to the symbolic time of the sacred history of Israel, the seven years of plenty and the seven years of dearth. The novel draws on the biblical account also when it narrates that Ephraim and Manasseh were born before the time of famine, while at the beginning of the seven years of famine Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain:

a) First reference to Aseneth, daughter of Petephres, in *Genesis/Incipit* of the novel.

Genesis (LXX), 41.45-47.

> And Pharaoh called the name of Joseph, Psonthomphanech; and he gave him Aseneth, the daughter of Petephres, priest of Heliopolis, to wife. And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. And the land produced, in the seven years of plenty, whole handfuls of corn.

J & A, 1.1-2; cf. 3.1.

> And it happened in the first year of the seven years of plenty, in the second month, on the fifth of the month: Pharaoh sent out Joseph to drive around the whole land of Egypt. And Joseph came in the fourth month of the first year, on the eighteen of the month, into the territory of Heliopolis…

b) Second reference to Aseneth, and Birth of Ephraim & Manasseh in *Genesis*/end of the first part of the novel.

Genesis (LXX), 41.50.

> And to Joseph were born two sons, before the seven years of famine came, which Aseneth, the daughter of Petephres, priest of Heliopolis, bore to hi

J & A, 21.9

> And it happened after this… (the wedding of Joseph and Aseneth), Aseneth conceived from Joseph, and gave birth to Manasseh and Ephraim … in Joseph's house.

c) Passage from time of plenty to time of dearth: both *Genesis* and *J & A* introduce Jacob and his sons' arrival to Egypt; in the novel, the second narrative part begins.

Genesis (LXX), 41.53-56.

> And the seven years of plenty passed away… And the seven years of famine began to come (…) And Jacob having seen that there was a sale of corn in Egypt said to his sons…

J & A, 22.1-2.

> And it happened after this: The seven years of plenty passed and the seven years of famine began to come. And Jacob heard about Joseph his son, and Israel[110] went to Egypt with his whole family, in the second year of the famine, in the second month, on the twenty-first of the month, and dwelt in the land of Goshen.

The relation of *J & A* to the Septuagint is made evident by the use of similar and even identical expressions, as already noted. In the novel more detailed elements indicate time: symbolic numbers, which refer to a particular system of religious-philosophical exegesis and conform to a diffused trend in post-biblical commentaries and pseudepigrapha, like the book of the *Jubilees*.[111] However, the most important time in the novel is a universal category, outside chronological frames, as in the recurring expression 'forever and ever'.[112] Other symbolic elements contribute to create a significant chronological dimension, meaning the people of Israel and successive human generations. Thus, the expression that compares a high, indefinite number to the sand, 'like the sand of the sea', ὡσεὶ τὴν ἄμμον τῆς θαλάσσης, is a metaphor quantifying the corn that Joseph collects. Indeed, Joseph's presentation in the Septuagint has inspired the hero's characterization in the novel; *J & A* modifies the time of the story, creating a solemn atmosphere for Joseph's arrival to Heliopolis as the saviour of Egypt and the champion of God.

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[110] Note how in the novel the patriarch Jacob is called by his divine and eponymous name of Israel.
[111] See Docherty (2004).
[112] See the next chapter 2 for an extensive analysis of the expression εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον in *J & A*.

> **LXX.** And Joseph gathered very much corn as the sand of the sea, until it could not be numbered, as there was no number of it.[113]

> **J & A.** … And Joseph came… into the territory of Heliopolis, and was gathering the grain of that region like the sand of the sea.[114]

Likewise, starting from the biblical text, Philo of Alexandria lists the themes of plenty and dearth as symbolic categories in the book of *Genesis*:

> It (the Book of Genesis) has received this title despite its embracing numberless other matters; for it tells of peace and war, of fruitfulness and barrenness, of dearth and plenty…[115]

Although in *J & A* the opposite concepts do not receive an explicit exegesis, the motifs of plenty and fruitfulness can be counted among the underlying senses encoded in the novel. The biblical simile that presents Joseph's activity in Egypt during the time of plenty is faithfully reported in the story. Joseph's portrayal as a collector of goods renders justice to the biblical representation. Moreover, the symbolic value of the 'sand of the sea' finds an interesting parallel in Philo of Alexandria's treatise *On Dreams*: the sand of the earth signifies human generations, which are governed throughout the ages by a rational mind, thus partaking in the divine dimension. The sea and the land of Egypt are assumed in Philo's exegesis as the emblem of the domain of passions, sense-perception and the material world.

> Wisdom's race is likened to the sand of the earth, both because its number is without limit and because the sand-bank forces back the inroads of the sea, as those of sinful and unjust deeds are kept back by trained reason.[116]

If it is possible to establish a connection between the image of the sand of the sea and the sand of the earth, Joseph in the novel as well as in Jewish-Hellenistic exegetical writings surpasses the role of benefactor and saviour of the land of Egypt that traditional accounts attributed to him, undertaking the task to guarantee a prosperous life to the next generations and unifying cultural groups at the same time. As the biblical account records, Jacob and his tribe migrate to the realm of Egypt in an ideal

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[113]*Genesis*: LXX, 41.49.
[114]*J & A*, 1.2
[115]*On Abraham*, 1.1
[116]*On Dreams*, 1.175

time, when a wise Pharaoh still respected the culture of Israel. Therefore the chronological framework of *J & A* is not contingent, limited to a particular story, but aims to become an indefinite age, similar to eternity and comprehensive of the tripartite dimension of time that is, the past sacred history of Israel, the present of the story, which might reflect in fiction a historical context contemporary to the anonymous author of *J & A*, and a conditioned hope for the people of Israel, projected in the future of a prophecy.

Indeed, Joseph's arrival in Heliopolis is announced by Pentephres the priest as happening 'today' (σήμερον), which according to Philo of Alexandria is an equivalent of the expression 'forever and ever', translation from the Greek εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον, a variant reading of analogous turns of phrase frequent in the Hellenistic Bible, the Septuagint.

> (Pentephres to Aseneth): 'Joseph, the Powerful One of God, is coming to us today. And he is chief of the whole land of Egypt, and the king Pharaoh appointed him king of the whole land.'[117]

All the crucial events of the love-story are presented as existing in the sphere of eternity. Pentephres understands that his daughter is to become Joseph's wife forever, and the sacred marriage of the protagonists is repeatedly defined in these terms. The time of αἰών denotes not only an eschatological dimension, but the limited time of human life in its whole extension, like in the phrase 'for life', or the time which subsequent human generations protract. Significantly, the novel ends with a positive message of tolerance, forgiveness and fair respect for one's fallen enemies.

> And Pharaoh mourned exceedingly for his firstborn son, and from the mourning he fell ill; and Pharaoh died at a hundred and nine years, and left his diadem to Joseph. And Joseph reigned as king of Egypt for forty-eight years, and after this he gave the diadem to Pharaoh's younger offspring, who was at the breast when Pharaoh died. And Joseph was like a father to Pharaoh's younger son in the land of Egypt all the days of his life. [118]

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[117] *J & A*, 4.9

[118] *J & A*, 29.10-11. In Burchard's Greek text we read: [πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς αὐτοῦ]; this reading has been reconstructed on the basis of the Syriac translation, the earliest extant testimony of *J & A*.

Therefore, the analysis of the time of the story/narrative time, corresponding to the chronological framework and overall structure of *J & A*, and the transcendent, symbolic time of αἰών indicates that the narrative conveys a Jewish and subsequently early Christian religious-philosophical outlook, transcending the dimension of a love-romance and assuming a universal ethical-religious value. The works of the Jewish exegete and philosopher Philo of Alexandria provide support for a better knowledge of philosophical Hellenistic texts and post-biblical exegetical writings, like the novel itself. If *J & A* was composed in Egypt after the translation of the Hebrew scrolls into Greek, in the span of time that goes from the second century B.C. to the early second century A.D., *J & A* is likely to represent the worldview of Jewish communities in the Hellenistic cities of Egypt, under Ptolemaic or early-Roman rule. The choice of the literary form of the novel, an open, fluid and perhaps 'minor' genre in classifications of ancient-Hellenistic rhetoric, points to interesting considerations. In fact, it is feasible that the anonymous author intended to disguise his identity in a Hellenic literary persona, expressing originally Jewish cultural heritage by means of Hellenic literary modes, probably hinting at the *paideia* in which Jewish learned writers were educated. Consequently, the aim of *J & A* may have been to appeal to an audience acquainted with the novelistic genre, in an age when the novel saw its rise and heyday. The novelistic story is an original, independent tale which was potentially well received by a multiethnic audience.

1.3.2 Joseph among the Patriarchs: Philo's narrative and *J & A*.

Philo of Alexandria's treatises contain philosophical interpretation and allegorical readings of Scripture, as well as narrative expansions of the biblical episodes. The patriarchs are presented as the fathers of the nation of Israel, who owned a pure primitive wisdom, foundation of the written Law given to Moses. In Philo's

allegorical exegesis, the patriarchs embody the Law, representing dispositions of the human soul in universal terms. As I shall demonstrate in the following analysis, Joseph is treated as a patriarch and the figure of the ideal politician in Philo's biographical tract on Joseph. However, throughout the allegorical treatises, such as the two books on dreams sent by God, Joseph assumes ambivalent traits, becoming the emblem of political ambition and vainglory, which is ultimately overcome by his extraordinary change of heart. The importance of μετάνοια in Philo's characterization of Joseph may be significant to our understanding of *J & A*. In fact, the novel portrays Joseph as the 'champion of God' and an ethical model, while depicting the notion of a 'change of heart' in Aseneth's ritual mourning, confession and transformation. Indeed, the images of personified Repentance in heaven and of Aseneth as a 'City of Refuge' illustrate respectively a condition of the human soul and salvation in a transcendent, if not clearly eschatological dimension, in universal terms. These most evident parallels between the scriptural re-writing in the novel and Philo of Alexandria are confirmed by several points of contact between Philo's exegesis and the allegorical imagery of *J & A*, as I shall demonstrate in the present section.

Philo recognizes the historicity of Scripture stating that Moses, as the lawgiver of the Jews, handed down to the people of Israel the Decalogue of the Law, and as the author of the holy books, he kept the memory of events from Creation and the age of the Patriarchs.[119] Although the literal sense is never to be rejected, Philo ascribes to Moses an allegorical narrative. The surface meaning of the sacred text hints at an underlying message, with philosophical, educative, religious purposes. It is noteworthy that in the first paragraphs of the treatise on Abraham two triads of wise ancestors are introduced.[120] These biblical characters become, in Philo's explanation, personified phases in the story of the human soul, which is recorded by Moses in allegorical terms. The first triad is represented by the 'imperfectly wise' ancestors who lived before the mythical Deluge. These are Enos, symbol of Hope,

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[119]In the treatises *On the Decalogue* and *On the Special Laws*, the Decalogue is considered as a synthesis of general principles, summarizing the other particular precepts of the Law. Philo is the first author to 'extrapolate the Decalogue from the general context of the Law'; a distinction between the Ten Commandments and the general Law did not exist in the Torah, as it is remarked by Rosso Ubigli, in Calabi (2003) 68.
[120]*Abr.* 7-47.

Enoch, embodiment of Repentance or Improvement, and Noah, emblem of Justice, the virtue of perfection, which saved him and few other living beings from the flood.

The name Enos is significant for its meaning of 'man' in the Chaldean or Hebrew language, equivalent to the Greek ἄνθρωπος, because the virtue of hope (ἐλπίς), is shared by all true human beings in their first stage towards the search for wisdom and blessings.[121] In the allegorical treatise *On Rewards and Punishments*, the value of Enos is introduced as the reward of true humanity for the worthy man who 'sets his hope on God', origin of life and refuge from harm and degeneration.[122] Good lawgivers convey a message of hope in the laws of their communities, as it is stated in the life of Abraham. The Law allows faithful believers to learn virtue both through obedience to exhortation and command, and to the unwritten 'law of nature', which is intuitively and spontaneously understood.[123] Enoch is associated with repentance and moral improvement (μετάνοια καὶ βελτίωσις), because the nature of the virtue is the dynamic passage from a lower or worse condition to the ethical improvement of the soul. Accordingly the ancient patriarch, in the account of Genesis, 'walked with God' when he was close to the end of his life. After Enoch was transferred to the divine sphere, his body could not be found as the hero knew no death, but took part in the mysterious wisdom of God. Philo interprets the name of Enoch as 'recipient of grace' (κεχαρισμένος), according to the Greek meaning of the term, because he was chosen to be transferred by God's unswerving thought. As he represents the new life of virtue that replaces the old one, Enoch 'is not found', being invisible to those who privilege earthly goods in a mixture of iniquities.

In a digression about the wise man's peaceful activity, Philo states that the philosopher settles down in a quiet lonely place, not because of contempt for the other men, being indeed a philanthropist, but in order to spend time in the ancient authors' intellectual company. Indeed, literary works of the past keep fundamental human virtues alive.[124] Although it is not explicitly maintained in the narrative

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[121]*Abr.* 7-8.
[122]*De Praemiis et Poenis (Praem.)*, 13-14. In every passage dealing with virtues, recurs the metaphor of the reward for the victory in a contest.
[123]*Abr.* 16.
[124]*Abr.*, 17-25; this passage may be an allusion/reminiscence of Plato, *rep.* 496a-e: Socrates presents himself as an example of a private, retiring philosopher, because the true philosopher stays quiet…

treatise on Abraham, the wise man's isolated place may represent figuratively the exegete's allegorical activity. In fact, while arguing for the necessity to acknowledge both literal-historical and allegorical senses of sacred Scripture, Philo represents himself as an intellectual exegete withdrawing temporarily from political activities. A passage of the treatise on Abraham's migration is a polemic against the intellectual category of the 'extreme allegorists'.[125] Indeed, should interpreters of Scripture deprive the word of God of its literal sense, the text would be incomplete in its meaning. In the following simile, the same will happen to disembodied souls, which can never dwell in the metaphorical city, image of the divine architectural order, living isolated in the wilderness instead.[126]

In the Bible as well as in exegetical commentaries, a change of name indicates a change of identity and a change of heart for the ancestors of Israel. In the novel, Aseneth undertakes a mystical transformation, which is sealed by her new name. As a mother of Israel, she becomes the earthly counterpart of heavenly Repentance, hypostasis of the virtue which is depicted as a beautiful virgin. Aseneth's change of identity is announced by the man from heaven.

> And your name shall no longer be called Aseneth, but your name shall be City of Refuge, because in you many nations will take refuge with the Lord God, the Most High, and under your wings many people trusting in the Lord God will be sheltered, and behind your walls will be guarded those who attach themselves to the Most High God in the name of Repentance.[127]

Thus, Aseneth becomes the earthly counterpart of Repentance as well as an allegorical City of Refuge. The cities of refuge appear in normative biblical verses, for instance in the books of *Numbers* and *Leviticus*, as inviolable havens where those who had committed a crime unintentionally could find asylum until a religious authority judged their case. Philo of Alexandria explains the significance of the cities

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and then departs with cheerfulness and good temper. Philo's figure of Isaac may also be inspired to this Platonic image. Cf. *Abr.* 17, for the significance of Enoch, and the etymological meaning of his name in Hebrew and for the Hellenes. The parallel episodes in *Praem.* 15-16 presents migration, a new home and a life of solitude as the proper rewards for abandoning material needs and choosing the spiritual values of the soul.

[125] I am indebted to Sarah Pearce and her seminar about 'Philo and the extreme allegorists', held at the Oriental Institute in Oxford in March 2009.

[126] *Migr.* 89. See Radice (2000) 40: literary and allegorical senses are presented according to an angle that smoothes their opposition.

[127] *J & A*, 15.7; and cf. the description of personified Repentance: 'For Repentance is in the heavens, an exceedingly beautiful and good daughter of the Most High'.

of refuge in connection to the concept of μετάνοια, thus relating traditional lore to contemporary ethical thought.[128] Joseph represents the virtue, embodying the passage to a better ethical state. In the biblical story, the hero's bones are transferred with Moses' exodus from Egypt to his native land, Shechem.[129] In Philo's interpretation Joseph's bones, which are brought from Egypt to Shechem, illustrate the hero's repentance as the worth-loving symbol of the virtue for the Jewish people. The tradition also points to the complex relationship which Hellenistic Jews held with the 'alien' land of Egypt.

> And with good reason too, since Moses the revealer (ὁ ἱεροφάντης) preserves from destruction the story of his (Joseph's) repentance, so worthy of love and remembrance (ἀξιέραστον καὶ ἀξιομνημόνευτον... τὴν μετάνοιαν), under the symbol of the bones which he held should not be suffered to remain buried forever in Egypt.[130]

It may be significant that *J & A* never mentions Joseph's bones, while only remarking the long royalty of Joseph in Egypt, until the Patriarch passed the crown to the Pharaoh's youngest heir.[131]

A long passage in the treatise *On Flight and Finding* explains the significance of the cities of refuge according to Jewish ideology. Judah and Levi represent the royal and priestly powers, the pillars upon which the symbolic nation of Israel is founded; the Levites are the tribe to which the six cities of refuge are allotted, because they attend to the sacred Tabernacle. Philo's allegorical explanation of the mother-cities as places of refuge contains parallels to Aseneth's portrayal as a City of Refuge. Both Philo and the author(s) of the novel in fact develop the biblical notion of the cities of refuge going further the function of a shelter for those who have committed unintentional crimes. Thus, Aseneth becomes an allegorical mother-city of refuge, offering a safe haven to those who experience a true change of heart; the narrative goes beyond the literal sense, making Aseneth a universal symbol of

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[128] *Fug.* 99-100.
[129] *Ex.*, 13.19; *Josh.*, 24.32
[130] *Som.*, 2.109.
[131] *J & A*, 29.10-11: 'And Pharaoh mourned exceedingly for his firstborn son, and from the mourning he fell ill; and Pharaoh died at a hundred and nine years, and left his diadem to Joseph. And Joseph reigned as king of Egypt for forty-eight years, and after this he gave the diadem to Pharaoh's younger offspring, who was at the breast when Pharaoh died. And Joseph was like a father to Pharaoh's younger son in the land of Egypt all the days of his life'.

repentance, forgiveness and conversion. In universal terms, Aseneth might illustrate the community of Diaspora Judaism or proselytes from different ethnic groups. An additional, more profound significance is however given to the cities of refuge in Philo's exegesis. In the allegorical commentary on *Flight and Finding*, Philo explains that the true mother-city where people can find refuge is the 'divine word'. Entrusting oneself to the divine word means to know Scripture that is, Moses' teachings encoded in allegorical figures.

> … the most revered, veritable and worthy mother-city, (is) not only a city, is the divine word (ὁ θεῖος… λόγος), and to take refuge firstly in it is extremely advantageous… Such are the six cities, which Moses calls 'places of refuge.[132]

The notion of the divine λόγος seems to be contained implicitly in *J & A*. As Sabrina Inowlocki has pointed out, in the novel the themes of silence and speech assume symbolic values. At the beginning of the narrative, Aseneth speaks arrogant words to her father, thus showing an inappropriate behaviour for a female positive character. After meeting Joseph, the heroine repents for her words, radically changing her speech into lyric modes, the prayers and psalm of her confession. In addition, like Enoch in Philo's allegorical account, Joseph in the novel disappears from the visible world when he leaves Pentephres' house and also when Aseneth goes to explore their fields accompanied by guards but without him.[133] Inowlocki has acutely compared the Joseph and Aseneth's story to Odysseus' wanderings. The seven years that Odysseus spent in Calypso's island correspond to Aseneth's seven days of mourning in solitude until she is released by the man from heaven. Like Aseneth after her encounter with Joseph, Penelope is lamenting her husband's absence in her upper room (ὑπερῷον), until she falls asleep and is visited in her dream by the speaking image of her sister, which is sent by Athena to comfort her.[134] In Philo's allegorical interpretation of the Homeric myth, Penelope embodies Philosophy, and is opposed to the encyclical education, which is represented by her maidservants. Thus, the suitors mating with the queen's handmaidens are an image of the human mind unable to attain philosophical knowledge, and therefore relying

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[132] *Fug.*, 94-100.
[133] Inowlocki (2002) 40-41.
[134] *Od.*, 4.787-788.

on traditional arts.[135] When Odysseus escapes from Charybdis' snares, the hero becomes symbol of the flight from the cares of mortal existence.[136] In the same pattern, Odysseus' shipwreck off the island of Scheria, where the Phaeacians welcome the hero, allegorizes the human struggle amid the storm and shipwreck of material life.[137] If hints at these allegorical interpretations of the *Odyssey* can be detected in *J & A*, the novel was conceived as a learned, sophisticated allegorical commentary on the sacred Scripture, which made use of Hellenic literary sources reinterpreting them in a different cultural system.

If we turn to Philo's treatises we shall see that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob constitute the 'truly wise' patriarchs.[138] According to the allegorical sense, they represent virtues which the human soul may either possess by nature or achieve through education and practice. Philo synthesizes the duplicity of a reading which goes beyond the literal sense, yet maintaining the value of the original story: 'whether we think of them as men or exemplars of soul (ψυχῆς τρόπων)'.[139] The historical account speaks of the Patriarchs as 'wise men', conveying at the same time a nationalistic concept, because Abraham, Isaac and Jacob represent 'men of wisdom (…) founders of our nation'.[140] The name of the nation itself, Israel, means 'He who sees God', as it is explained in the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel of God, when the patriarch received the new name of Israel, thus becoming the eponymous hero of his people.[141] The foundation stones of Israel are its royal-political power and sacerdotal authority, which are embodied in other Philonian *loci* by the figures of

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[135]Dillon (1981): see the treatise *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies*; similarly, in the story of Abraham the legitimate wife, Sarah, represents Wisdom or Paideia, whereas her Egyptian maidservant Agar is another figure of τὰ ἐγκύκλια.

[136]*Som.*, 2.70, quoting *Od.*, 12.219: τούτου (*i. e.* Charybdis) μὲν καπνοῦ καὶ κύματος ἐκτὸς ἔεργε νῆα.

[137]Cf. Edwards (1988), for a comprehensive analysis of Odysseus' attributes and allegorical values in the Neoplatonic philosophers Plotinus and Porphyry.

[138]The only extant treatise among the three mentioned is that *On Abraham*; the lives of Isaac and Jacob are lost, while we can compare with *On Abraham* the story of Joseph in the homonymous treatise and the two books *On Moses*, which recount the extraordinary life of the lawgiver.

[139]*Abr.*, 47; this comment is applied to the previous triad of ancestors, Enos, Enoch, and Noah.

[140]*On the Decalogue (Dec.)*, 1: ἀρχηγέτας τοῦ ἡμετέρου ἔθνους. For this discussion on the significance and value of the Patriarchs, see Borgen (1997) 70.

[141]*Gen.*, 32. 24-32; cf. *Abr.*, 57: 'for the nation is called in the Hebrew tongue Israel, which, being interpreted, is 'He who sees God'; this etymological explanation of the name of Israel is in other passages rendered by means of periphrases, as in *Mut.*(*On the change of names*) 189; *Somn.*, 2.276-279. For these considerations, see Rosso Ubigli, in Calabi (2003) 59.

Judah and Levi: 'the oracles speak of this august and precious trinity, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as parent of one species of that race, which is called royal, and priesthood and holy nation.'[142] Abraham is therefore considered as the first proselyte of God and founder of the nation.[143]

Philo's historical account constitutes the basis of further considerations on the philosophical level, which aim at the interpretation of the Law. In fact, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob become the 'archetypes and in themselves unwritten laws.'[144] Abraham is defined as '… himself a law and an unwritten statute.'[145] The core of this statement is the patriarchs' role as 'living laws', embodiments of the Law, before the Decalogue was passed down to Moses. A widespread Jewish tradition portrayed Abraham as a philosopher able to investigate natural phenomena, so that he passed from the knowledge of physical sciences to the quest for God in the contemplation of higher entities. In the viewpoint of rabbinical tracts, Abraham was an example of virtue and wisdom because he 'obeyed the (pre-existent) Law'. On the contrary, Philo's reasoning aims to demonstrate that Abraham and the other Patriarchs, 'represented the Law', through their deeds and words, before the Torah was written.[146]

In order to understand the function of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, the passage from the literal meaning to the dimension of spiritual thought is necessary, as Philo explains in the treatise on *Abraham*.

> The actual words of the story are an encomium on Abraham as a man; but, according to those who proceed from the literal to the spiritual (ἀπὸ τῶν ῥητῶν ἐπὶ τὰ νοητά), characters of soul (τρόποι ψυχῆς) are indicated also, and therefore it will be well to investigate them too.[147]

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[142] *Abr.* 56-57, with reference to *Ex.*, 19.6.
[143] *Abr.* 276. The concepts of 'proselyte' and 'proselytism' are significant if they are considered in the time of the authors who conveyed it. In the philosophical thought of Hellenistic Judaism, Abraham becomes the emblem of the proselyte listening to the divine command and starting a symbolic journey towards his true nation.
[144] *Dec.*, 1.
[145] *Abr.*, 276.
[146] See for consideration on Abraham as a philosopher, Cohen (1995) 299-303, Abraham as a model for the Law through his deeds: Borgen (1997) 69. The concept of an 'unwritten law' (ἄγραφος νόμος), is often associated with the 'natural law' but not always identified with it. In Greek philosophical thought, cf. Aristotle, *rhet.*, I.14.7. 1375, and Sophocles' *Antigone.*
[147] *Abr.* 217.

The link between the historical and the allegorical senses of Scripture is expressed in the divine words which are passed down to Moses, as Philo explains in the homonymous biographical treatise. When Moses is exhorted to undertake an intermediary role between the divine sphere and his people, he asks God His name as a proof that his announcement is truthful. The divine voice replies reminding Moses of the three Patriarchs, archetypes of the original wisdom and the Law:

> … tell them not only that I am God, but also the God of the three men whose names express their virtue, each of them exemplar (κανών) of the wisdom they have gained, Abraham by teaching, Isaac by nature, Jacob by practice.[148]

The three Patriarchs are thus recognized as the truthful guarantees of the divine word.

The belief that virtues and wisdom can be acquired through teaching, nature and practice was already held in Hellenic philosophical thought.[149] Philo reinterprets Hellenic categories of knowledge and ethics in a spiritual sense:

> For the holy word seems to be searching into types of soul, all of them of high worth, one which pursues the good through teaching, one through nature and one through practice. The first called Abraham, the second Isaac and the third Jacob, are symbols of virtue acquired respectively by teaching, nature and practice.[150]

Indeed, Hellenistic Judaism emphasized the ethical field of philosophical thought, responding to contemporary cultural-historical needs. Hellenistic philosophical schools privileged reflection on moral virtues and their opposites, as well as logic, the study of language, and physics, the science which deals with the κόσμος and natural phenomena. Although Philo and other witnesses of Hellenistic-Jewish culture, such as the *Letter of Aristeas*, distinguished Jewish lore from Hellenistic philosophy, preserving the significance of religious rites and tradition, they added a universal significance to the Law by means of rhetorical devices and re-writings of stories. The treatise on *Abraham* illustrates the moral, allegorical and spiritual readings in Philo. The narrative structure of the treatise exemplifies the metaphors

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[148] *Mos.* 1.76.

[149] E.g. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, X, IX, 6, 21-22. Ps. Plutarch, *De liberis educandis*, 2A-C, associates the triad of ethical knowledge with Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato.

[150] *Abr.* 52.

which are built into it, thus guiding the readers' interpretation. Accordingly, every episode in Abraham's story is followed by the explanation of its allegorical sense. The historical account becomes paradigmatic by means of the allegorical reading; the relevant stories are the patriarch's migration, the adventures of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt, their hospitality to the three angels of God, and the prevented sacrifice of Isaac, which was commanded by God to test Abraham's faithfulness.[151]

In Philo's exegesis, each episode can be read in two perspectives, according to the letter and following the rules of allegory. For instance Abraham's migration (ἀποικία) from his native land of Chaldea to Haran, is in the literal sense the journey of a wise man (αἱ... ἀποικίαι τῷ μὲν ῥητῷ τῆς γραφῆς ὑπ' ἀνδρὸς σοφοῦ γεγόνασι) whereas according to the allegory migrations signify the path of the 'virtue-loving soul in its search for the true God.' (κατὰ δὲ τοὺς ἐν ἀλληγορίᾳ νόμους ὑπὸ φιλαρέτου ψυχῆς τὸν ἀληθῆ ζητούσης θεόν).[152] In the metaphor, the journey represents a change in the sphere of knowledge and the ethical dimension. On his path in pursuit of the truth, Abraham leaves behind astronomy and the 'Chaldean creed.'[153] The patriarch significantly achieves the highest level of wisdom through learning (μάθησις), the necessary starting point for the acquisition of a new system of knowledge. In a parallel account of the treatise on *Dreams* Abraham's father, Terah, represents the knowledge which is attained by the human soul and his Greek name is appropriately Socrates, the philosopher who lead his life according to the precept of the Delphic oracle, 'know thyself.'[154] It is significant to our understanding of Philo's thought to remark that Socrates is defined

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[151] *Abr.*, 88, 119, 147, 200, 217, 236. The point which is repeatedly highlighted in the expressions designating the passage from the literal to the allegorical sense is the focus on the human soul rather than on the historical characters.

[152] *Abr.*, 68.

[153] *Abr.*, 77. The term Χαλδαῖος, and the adjectives and adverbs related to it recur in Philo as synonyms for the designation of 'Hebrew', especially referring to the language. Abraham and his people were the ancestors of Jewish culture and the nation; on the meaning of the Greek terms that refer to the people and the land of Israel, see Rosso-Ubigli in Calabi (2003) 54-59.

[154] In Philo's account, Terah actively decides to leave Chaldaea with his son Abraham and to migrate to Haran; an indirect but easily recognizable reference to polemic-comic traditions about Socrates is to be seen in a rhetorical question, which assumes an exhortative function, at *On Dreams*, 1.54: 'And why, treading as you do on earth, do you leap over the clouds?', τὶ δὲ βαίνων ἐπὶ γῆς ὑπὲρ νεφέλας πηδᾷς; the allusive reference is probably to Aristophanes' *Clouds*, the comedy in which Socrates was depicted as a sophist; at Philo's time the figure of Socrates was represented according to various typologies in contemporary philosophical schools.

as a real human being, whereas Terah is the personified reasoning/discourse about self-knowledge.[155] However Abraham progresses further, understanding that to develop the knowledge of one's soul will increase the sense of human inadequacy, because true wisdom is the investigation on the essence of God and divine things.[156] In fact, only through despair of his own human knowledge Abraham will be able to grasp the understanding of God, the absolute existent being (ὁ δ' ἀπογνοὺς ἑαυτὸν γινώσκει τὸν ὄντα).[157]

As Ellen Birnbaum has pointed out, in the relevant sections of the treatise on *Dreams*, Terah had to stop his journey at Haran, symbol of the senses which confines human knowledge to the material world. To resume, Socrates, the Greek philosopher, is the emblem of self-knowledge, Terah of a more abstract quality of self-knowledge, while only Abraham is able to move 'beyond the knowledge of the self to attain the knowledge of God.'[158] Birnbaum assumes as the starting-point of her argument Dawson's central thesis about the nature of Philo's allegorical interpretation. Dawson stated that through his reading and re-writing of Scripture, Philo aimed to demonstrate that Moses, lawgiver and author of the sacred texts, 'precedes the classical authors in time and surpasses them in wisdom.'[159] The emblematic triad of Socrates, Terah and Abraham, according to Birnbaum, testifies to the belief in Jewish superiority that characterizes Philo's exegesis, however this particularistic view leaves space to a possible universalism, where all peoples, not only the Jews, may pursue virtues and wisdom, living in special relationship with God. Ultimately, Moses' role as the lawgiver of the Jews subsumes the archetypal function of the Law as the treasured, unsurpassed source of wisdom for every people:

> Moses himself was the best of all lawgivers in all countries, better in fact than any that have ever arisen among either the Greeks or the barbarians, and that his laws are most excellent and truly come from God (…) his laws (…) remain secure from the day when they were first enacted to now, and we may hope

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[155] *On Dreams*, 1.58: ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἄνθρωπος ἦν, Θάρρα δ'αὐτὸς ὁ λόγος ὁ περὶ τοῦ γνῶναί τινα ἑαυτὸν.

[156] *On Dreams*, 1.58-60. It has been discussed in a trend of criticism on Philo and the Judaism of his time, if the language of mysteries can be traced in the Alexandrian exegete and if an interpretation of Judaism as a mystery religion is reflected in his contemporary Hellenistic culture. This is still a debated subject, as it is presented by Mazzanti in Calabi (2003) 117-129.

[157] *On Dreams*, 1.60.

[158] Birnbaum (2003), especially 318-319.

[159] Dawson (1992) 107-110 on this subject, 109.

> that they will remain for all future ages as though immortal, so long as the sun and moon and the whole heaven and universe exist.[160]

Although superlatives in the above passage might be read as a statement of Jewish superiority, thus indicating a particularistic viewpoint, the mention of other peoples, Greeks and barbarians, seems to equate different cultures in universalistic perspective, as if all nations could take part in the sacred lore, which emanates from the one true God. However, Philo may also convey a 'diffusionistic idea', remarking that Jewish wisdom has been spreading among various cultures from times immemorial; after their precepts were codified as legislations, the Moses' law was accepted. As an educated Jew of the Diaspora, Philo conceived of his contemporaries as Hellenes, learned in the Greek system of education (παιδεία).

In this connection, *J & A* may constitute a significant example of the Jewish ideology in the Hellenistic age. If the novel was composed by a Jewish author active in Egypt, perhaps in Alexandria in the centuries at the turn of the era, *J & A* may have been conceived as a biblical commentary with the purpose of being in tune with contemporary cultural need and the Jewish interpretation of Hellenic literature. The positive message of tolerance and respect between Jews and Egyptians which is portrayed in the novel may have rendered in fiction 'diffusionistic' aspirations of the Jewish religious-philosophical thought potentially from the second century B.C. to the first-early second century A.D. This span of time, which has found considerable scholarly consensus,[161] has its historical boundaries in the translation of the Hebrew scrolls into Greek and in the persecutions against Jewish communities during the reign of Hadrian, in 135 A.D. This dating also implies that *J & A* is a Jewish-Hellenistic narrative, composed in a time that was relatively prosperous for Greek-speaking Jews living in multi-cultural cities. However, parallels with the allegorical method of Philo of Alexandria, Jewish intellectual who lived the tensions between

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[160] *Moses*, 2.12-14: Ὅτι δ' αὐτός τε νομοθετῶν ἄριστος τῶν πανταχοῦ πάντων, ὅσοι παρ' Ἕλλησιν ἢ βαρβάροις ἐγένοντο, καὶ οἱ νόμοι κάλλιστοι καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς θεῖοι (...) τὰ δὲ τούτου μόνου βέβαια, ἀσάλευτα, ἀκράδαντα, καθάπερ σφραγῖδι φύσεως αὐτῆς σεσημασμένα, μένει παγίως ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἐγράφη μέχρι νῦν καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἔπειτα πάντα διαμενεῖν ἐλπὶς αὐτὰ αἰῶνα ὥσπερ ἀθάνατα, ἕως ἂν ἥλιος καὶ σελήνη καὶ ὁ σύμπας οὐρανός τε καὶ κόσμος.

[161] See e.g. this remark in Hubbard (1997) 97 n.1.

his people and other ethnic minorities in first century A.D. Alexandria governed by Roman rule, point to a feasible composition of the novel in a later date, perhaps subsequent to the later Jewish versions of the Septuagint. Moreover, the absence of Hellenistic evidence or references to the novel in the Church Fathers allows for the hypothesis that *J & A* was either composed or re-written at the end of antiquity in Jewish-Christian environments. In any case, the versatility which allegory conferred to the novel enhanced its rich reception in several Christian environments throughout the ages. Indeed, the Jewish-Hellenistic heritage was well received and re-interpreted in early-Christianity, as if the ancient lore of Israel could flourish again in new perspectives.

As we have already noted, Philo interprets the patriarchs as the symbolic archetypes of the nation of Israel. To this prerogative, Philo adds by means of the allegorical reading that Abraham is always an emigrant and a stranger, undertaking a journey on the metaphorical way towards virtue, in the presence of God, with teaching as his guide. By contrast Isaac, paradigm of the 'self-taught' man, is the 'dweller on his native soil'.[162] Jacob relies on the active life, facing trials and struggling with toils on the field of a war against evil and vices.[163] In the allegory, the three wise men become different, yet related ways or methods to pursue virtue; they are not to be conceived as mortal men any longer, but as 'facts of nature', so that Abraham is rightly called the 'father', spiritual and logical parent, of Jacob, like instruction precedes practice, and education comes before exercise.[164] At the same time Isaac, symbol of the good achieved through natural endowment, is the proper

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[162] See *Som.*, 1.160 for the comparison between Abraham and Isaac as two figures of knowledge achieved respectively through learning and nature: 'For Isaac is a figure of knowledge gained by nature, knowledge which listens to and learns from no other teacher but itself, while Abraham is a figure of knowledge gained by instruction', ὁ μὲν γὰρ αὐτηκόου καὶ αὐτοδιδάκτου καὶ αὐτομαθοῦς φύσει περιγινομένης σύμβολον ἐπιστήμης ἐστίν, ὁ δὲ Ἀβραὰμ διδασκομένης…; and cf. *Som.*, 1.168 for the explanation of the value of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the metaphor of the way.

[163] *Som.* 1.168-169: the metaphor of the man striving in the arena is a recurrent image in relation to Jacob; *Som.* 1.179: Jacob is the figure of 'a toiling and striving soul', always accompanied by the presence of God. *Som.* 1.174: Jacob's war is led against the 'troop of passions and vices that oppose virtue'.

[164] Philo is commenting on the verse of *Genesis*, 28.13, in which the divine voice is called by the philosopher 'the oracle' (τὸ λόγιον) which said to Jacob: 'I am the Lord God of Abraham your father'… and 'the God of Isaac'.

father for Jacob after he has assumed the new name and nature of Israel, which means, if interpreted, 'he who sees God':

> If, however, our practical hero (*sc.* Jacob) exerts himself and runs to the end of the course (ἐὰν… δράμῃ πρὸς τὸ τέλος) and comes to see clearly what he formerly saw dimly as in a dream, and receives the impress of a nobler character and the name of Israel, 'he who sees God', in place of Jacob…[165]

The exegete's literary persona concludes the paragraph by defending the value of the commentary, which is not fiction, but the divine truth of the oracles, the word of God which is written on the 'sacred tables'.

> This is not a story (μῦθος) invented by me, but an oracle inscribed upon the sacred tables.[166]
> ταῦτα δὲ οὐκ ἐμός ἐστι μῦθος, ἀλλὰ χρησμὸς ἐν ταῖς ἱεραῖς ἀναγεγραμμένος στήλαις.

Along the same allegorical lines, the story of Isaac's sacrifice is interpreted as the figure of instruction, Abraham, which 'was not allowed to cause the extinction, among human generations, of the nature which learns untaught, called Isaac'.[167] Abraham in this explanation illustrates the life which is led in God's constant presence and friendship. Wise men maintain an attitude of 'stillness and attention' (ἡσυχίᾳ καὶ προσοχῇ) in front of God, so that they listen to the divine precepts and preserve them with everlasting memory (ἄληστον μνήμην).[168] In the treatise on *Abraham*, the episode is expanded with both historical and allegorical considerations. The first part of the long account contains narrative passages and novel-like details, such as the parents' joy for Isaac's birth, as well as symbolic elements: Abraham received the divine command to sacrifice his son in a remote place, far three days' journey from the inhabited land. Father and son ascend to the lofty place, walking steadily on the 'way of holiness', evident sign of their balanced

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[165]*Som.* 1.171-172.
[166]Cf. *J & A*, 22.8-9: Aseneth loves Levi for his prophetic qualities; and Levi, able to read and interpret the letters written in heaven, reveals this secret knowledge to Aseneth, seeing her place of rest in heaven. The faculty of reading the heavenly tablets is a widespread motif in Jewish-Hellenistic writings.
[167]*Som.*, 1.194: … ἡνίκα τε ἱερουργεῖν ἤρχετο καὶ ὁπότε δοὺς ἀπόπειραν εὐσεβείας ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀφανίσαι τὸ αὐτομαθὲς γένος.
[168] *Som.*, 1.193.

activity of thought rather than plainly of their equal steps.[169] The historical narrative aims to demonstrate, with additional apologetic purpose, that Abraham's gesture represented the accomplishment of the divine will. Isaac's rescue is therefore both preserved in the sacred books and engraved in the memory of readers.[170] In the following allegorical interpretation, Isaac is the emblem of pure heavenly joy which is a gift to men, but when it descends on earth, it is inevitably mixed with grieves. Isaac as an allegorical figure of joy partakes of a 'better nature', and signifies the condition of the soul which 'dwells in sunshine and calmness'.[171]

In the interpretation of the three messengers of God who visited Abraham and Sarah, Philo distinguishes between levels of knowledge by means of the terminology of mystical initiation. The divine envoys appear to be three according to the physical sight, but Abraham, able to discern their supernatural essence, their unity in spirit, will and purpose, addresses them as a single person:

> … (the appearance) of one, when that mind is highly purified and,(…) presses on to the ideal form which is free from mixture and complexity, and being self-contained needs nothing more; of three, when, as yet uninitiated into the highest mysteries (τὰς μεγάλας… τελετάς), it is still a votary only of the minorities…[172]

Still on the theme of learning, in the treatise on the allegorical interpretation of the Law, Philo introduces with a rhetorical question the means for human beings to achieve faith:

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[169] *Abr.*, 168-169: Isaac's birth and first youth. *Abr.* 169: the divine message commanding to sacrifice on a desert and lofty hill may symbolize Abraham's privileged relationship with God. The patriarch seems to take part in a mystery which is revealed exclusively to elected people; in the parallel passage of the treatise *Som.*, 1.193, the account of the sacrifice follows the praise of the wise man's friendship with God; *Abr.*, 172: the way has for its goal holiness, ὁδὸν… ἧς ὁσιότης τὸ τέλος, and wise men walk on this journey with the same purpose of mind rather than simply at the same pace: βαδίζοντες δ'ἰσοταχῶς οὐ τοῖς σώμασι μᾶλλον ἢ ταῖς διανοίαις.

[170] *Abr.*, 177: … οὐ μόνον ἐν ταῖς ἱεραῖς βίβλοις ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν ταῖς τῶν ἀναγινώσκων διανοίαις ἀνάγραπτος ἐστηλίτευται.

[171] *Abr.*, 207: '… and judged it well that the soul should at times dwell in sunshine and calm (εὐδιάσαι καὶ γαληνιάσαι ποτὲ τὴν ψυχήν)'. The metaphor belongs to the recurrent imagery of the external weather and conditions of the sea representing human events and passions.

[172] *Abr.*, 122. The notion is that 'theological knowledge cannot be acquired only directly', but in a mediated way, through entities that reveal themselves as coming into being. The distinction between 'little' and 'great mysteries' is of Platonic origin, and it is significant that Clement of Alexandria, in *Strom.*, V.11, applies the verb μανθάνειν to the former and the verb ἐποπτεύειν to the latter. Cf. Mazzanti, in Calabi (2003) 124.

> How should one come to believe God? By learning (ἐὰν μάθῃ) that all other things change but He is unchangeable. [173]

However, true learning (μάθησις) equals to understand that the divine principle is one and immutable. As knowledge is the basis of ethical-spiritual wisdom the human soul, of which Abraham is a representation, becomes faithful through instruction. Whereas all earthly phenomena and human experience are subject to countless changes the wise man, emblem of virtue, reflects the firmness which is an attribute of the divine dimension, standing metaphorically steady in front of God. Therefore the sage never sways on the 'kingly road', emblem of the righteousness of the Law in God's presence, which only virtue allows him to tread.[174] The patriarchs' migrations are in fact always directed towards the goal of a promised land.

The episode of the encounter between Abraham and the three angels also testifies to the patriarch's φιλανθρωπία, a virtue that assumed an important value in Hellenistic philosophical thought. God is the first model of 'love for humankind', which is reflected in the patriarch's deeds.[175] In the wise man's house, everyone has to practice virtue, working in harmony like the parts of a good soul or the crew on a ship under their captain's guidance. In fact in Philo's simile the three emissaries of God enter Abraham's house because 'the whole household, like a well-ordered crew, was obedient to a single call from him who steered them like a pilot.'[176] The simile of the ruler and pilot is also related to Abraham, in connection to the idea of firmness and stability of a just power, deriving from the right understanding of the universal order:

> But the wise man with more discerning eyes sees something more perfect perceived by the mind, something which rules and governs (δεσπόζεται καὶ κυβερνᾶται), the master and pilot of all else.[177]

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[173] *Leg. All.*, 2.84. This rhetorical strategy, which constitutes the technique of the *Questions and Answers in Genesis* and *Exodus*, is also typical of rabbinical tracts.
[174] *Abr.*, 204.
[175] *Abr.*, 79: God's φιλανθρωπία is manifest when the divine being reveals Himself rather than withdrawing from humanity in search of Him; *Abr.*, 107: Abraham manifests φιλανθρωπία towards the three travellers. *Abr.*, 109: In a wise man's house no one is slow in showing φιλανθρωπία.
[176] *Abr.*, 116.
[177] *Abr.*, 84.

The role of men exerting authority in society corresponds to the divine role in the κόσμος and to the function which the rational will fulfils in the human soul.

> For indeed the wise man is the first of the human race, as a pilot in a ship (κυβερνήτης μὲν ἐν νηΐ) or a ruler in a city or a general in war, or again as a soul in a body and a mind in a soul, or once more heaven in the world or God in heaven.[178]

In the treatise on Joseph the politician is compared to the pilot of a ship for the necessity to adapt various strategies according to different external conditions:

> The pilot is helped to a successful voyage by means which change with the changes of the wind, and does not confine his guidance of the ship to one method.[179]

As the figure of a politician, Joseph significantly receives from Jacob the 'coat of many colours', symbol of the multiple facets that are required in political life.[180] The metaphor of the ship with its alternate movement can also be associated to another recurrent figure in Philo, that of the scale wavering to keep its balance. The stableness of God is in fact contrasted to the changes occurring in the earthly, material realm.

> He Himself (the Master of Creation) stands ever steadfast, while his creation wavers and inclines in opposite directions.[181]

Therefore, the life of the man achieving wisdom through practice, the ἀσκητής, is 'at one time like a ship making life's voyage with fair winds, at another with ill winds.'[182] This life, exemplified by the figure of Jacob, is constituted of alternate days, metaphorical image of life alternatively replacing death. Hellenic myth is transferred by Philo to his exegesis of Scripture, because the concept of life eternally replacing death is exemplified in the story of the Dioscuri, the sons of Zeus and Leda and twin brothers Castor and Pollux.[183]

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[178] *Abr.*, 272.
[179] *Jos.*, 33.
[180] *Jos.*, 32.
[181] *Leg. All.*, 2.83; cf. *Som.*, 1.157, where God is compared to a charioteer or a helmsman on a ship. A learned analysis of the recurrences and meaning of these images can be found in Graffigna's contribution, in Calabi (2003) 131-146.
[182] *Som.*, 1.150.
[183] As Castor's real father was Tyndareus, only Pollux was immortal, but when his brother was killed in an ambush, Pollux asked Zeus to share immortality with Castor, and the twins' destiny was to spend in turn days in Hades. The relevant passage of *On Dreams* refers to the myth of Castor and Pollux, which is mentioned in *Od.*, 11.303. Following the metaphor of the ship, we may remember that the Dioscuri were also the traditional protector-deities for sailors.

In a related simile, the good pilot (κυβερνήτης) is presented as the one leading a ship according to various conditions of weather, while the true physician (ἰατρός) will recognize various symptoms, contrasting diseases with different remedies.[184] On the basis of these examples, Philo states that the politician must be πολυειδής and πολύμορφος.[185] The insistence on adjectives containing the common stem πολύ(-ς) appears to signify that political reality is complex, showing outward appearances, so that the expert in the art of ruling a state needs to be aware of the proper tactics to use every time various circumstances require appropriate actions. Indeed, one of the possible readings of the treatise on *Joseph* is the ideal statesman's portrayal. Thus the true political man (ὁ δὲ πολιτικὸς ὄντως) is made to announce in a rhetorical speech his wise conduct and purposes. Although this model politician is aware of the power of the multitude, as peoples are not subjects but the true rulers in political life, the wise man is not sold as a slave, indeed freely exerting his counsel, as well as undertaking the leadership of his country as a good guardian or a benevolent father, without deception and dissimulation.[186]

Joseph is thus portrayed as an ideal politician in the remote age of the patriarchs. However Philo also renders his view on history and politics recording contemporary political events in the treatises about Flaccus and the embassy to the emperor Gaius Caligula. In fact as an exponent of the educated, authoritative class in Alexandria Philo was part of the Jewish delegation to Rome, in 38-40 A.D. Flaccus Avilius, Roman prefect of Alexandria and the neighbouring land of Egypt, is portrayed as an excellent ruler endowed with complex skills. At the beginning of his

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[184]The image of the physician adapting different treatments according to the illnesses encountered is found also in *Prob.* 58, where the medical activity is compared to the use of consistent arguments to produce a logical discourse, '… just as physicians regularly use a greater multiformity of treatment to cure multiform diseases (ἐπεὶ δὲ τὰ ποικίλα τῶν νοσημάτων ἰατροῖς ἔθος ποικιλωτέραις ἰᾶσθαι θεραπείαις), so when statements regarded as paradoxical are put forward, their unfamiliarity renders it necessary to apply a succession of proofs to bear upon the subject'.

[185]*Jos.* 33-34. The similes of the helmsman and the physician recur in Philo's treatises, used as metaphorical images of the various means/remedies employed in these activities.

[186] *Jos.* 67-79. In the previous sections, Philo retells two episodes of the Joseph's story that is, when the hero is sold into slavery and when his brothers fake his death as a prey to wild beasts, in order to exemplify the destiny of the popular orator. This paradigmatic character is actually a slave of countless masters, the multitude he needs to follow and please. In this way the politician is also prey to an allegorical wild beast, vainglory (κενοδοξία), which from its ambushes 'seizes and destroys' its devotees; see *Jos.* 35-36.

mandate, Flaccus proves to understand difficult matters, being able to disclose even the unspoken truth.[187] Egyptian issues are defined as multiform and varied (πολύτροποι καὶ ποικίλαι), difficult to grasp, but Flaccus, as a model politician, is able to pin down matters without need of instructors, rather surpassing them in knowledge and consideration.[188] This positive outline of the character may assimilate Flaccus to Moses, archetype of the good lawgiver, educated by Greek and Egyptian teachers, but soon revealing a superior wisdom. As the rest of the story demonstrates, the Roman prefect's iniquitous 'change of heart' sharply contrasts with these potentially good premises. Reasons for this harmful, reversed μετάνοια are searched in corruption of Roman political life: after Tiberius' death, personages involved in politics and their families are considered as potential threats to the established power and ruthlessly executed.[189] In Philo's chronicle Flaccus' gradual loss of his wits as a consequence of hearing this news allows for the impious persecution of the Jewish community in Alexandria. This started with Egyptian uprisings and degenerated in the violation of the Jews' houses, leading eventually to the politician's personal tragedy. Already manipulated by the masses, compelled to act as on the stage, as theatrical images in the tract indicate, Flaccus ends up being witness to his own ruin. Real political life has been transformed in a tragic mock-performance while the formerly ideal politician has fallen prey to passions and the power of the multitude. In a graphic image, Flaccus laments his failure and deserved

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[187] *Flacc.* 2: 'He was a man who at first gave to all appearance a multitude of proofs of high excellence. He was sagacious and assiduous, quick to think out and execute his plans, very ready at speaking, and at understanding what was left unspoken better even than what was said'.

[188] *Flacc.* 3.

[189] *Flacc.* 8 ff. Thus Tiberius Gemellus, grandson of Tiberius, and Macro, tutor in the royal family, die in the persecution; cf. *Legat.* 32-61. The attribute of ποικίλος is here applied to Gaius' mind as a deceptive condition, only created by contrast to Macro's good nature: '… it was his (*sc.* Macro's) modesty which caused the simple-minded Gaius to be considered cunning', ὑφ' ἧς καὶ Γάιον ἁπλοῦν ὄντα ποικίλον νομίζεσθαι. Caligula's speech is however defined as artificial and cunning when the emperor moves charges against Macro in *Legat.* 59: 'Some people accepted these charges as veracious, not knowing the deceptive and cunning character (τὸν φένακα τρόπον) of the speaker, for his artificial and cunning disposition (τὸ πεπλασμένον… καὶ ποικίλον τῶν ἠθῶν) was not yet manifest'. Again in matter of politics and illicit personal profit Capito, the tax-collector of the Jews, is presented as an unscrupulous man, capable of making money by various ways; see *Legat.* 199: '… by his rapacity and peculation he has amassed much wealth in various forms', καὶ παρεκλέγει ποικίλον τινὰ καὶ πολὺν πλοῦτον ἠθροικώς.

punishment in pathetic soliloquies on the sea-shore of Andros, the island of his exile.[190]

By contrast in the biography of the statesman, Joseph is praised as a model of virtue, firmness and positive 'change of heart'; the pattern of his life is opposite to that of the Roman governor Flaccus Avilius. As the biblical story goes, the hero was unfairly charged with lack of σωφροσύνη in the mendacious account of his master's wife and sent to jail. In a long digression, Philo reflects on the plight of the prisoners in jail, considering that they are led to the lowest condition of humanity that is the worst corruption for their soul. In this background, the presence of Joseph causes a radical change on the people and the environment: the prison becomes a 'house of temperance' (σωφρονιστήριον), and the prisoners are converted through the words and the practical example of Joseph's life.[191] This virtue is exceptional, proper of the man who belongs to God, as it is stated in the *Allegorical Interpretation*: '… self-mastery is not a possession of every man, but only of the man beloved by God'.[192]

The inmates consider Joseph 'a consolation for (the present) misfortunes and a defence against future ills'. His life is described as a model of temperance and all virtue, (σωφροσύνης καὶ πάσης ἀρετῆς), which the inmates try to imitate. The uncommon effect on the others' soul is compared to the remedy for serious and seemingly incurable illnesses: 'he converted even those who seemed to be quite incurable, abated by 'the long-standing distempers of their soul' (μακραὶ νόσοι τῆς ψυχῆς).[193] They reproach themselves for their past misdeeds and repent, changing their mind and conduct (μετανοοῦσι). The effect of this conversion (μετάνοια) is expressed in a singular metaphorical speech, similar in tone, content and symbolic elements to the words Aseneth pronounces seeing Joseph for the first time: 'Where in the old days was so great a blessing, which at first we failed to find? See, when it shines (ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἐπιλάμψαντος αὐτοῦ) on us we behold as in a mirror (ὡς πρὸς

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[190]*Flacc.* 151.
[191]*Jos.*, 86.
[192]*Leg. All.*, 2.79. In the metaphor, the serpent of Eve represents pleasure, while the serpent of Moses, which transforms in Moses's staff, is symbol of self-mastery. Moses' rod also represents education (*paideia*).
[193]*Jos.*, 87.

κάτοπτρον) our misbehaviour and are ashamed'.[194] In the novel itself, Joseph prompts the heroine's change of heart; the transcendent value of μετάνοια and the significance of Aseneth's transformation for her new role as Joseph's spouse and City of Refuge for all who repent is explained in the heavenly man's speech.

Philo depicts various portrayals of Joseph according to the leading theme and purpose of his treatises. In the conclusion of the *Life*, Joseph's brothers are afraid that after Jacob's death, Joseph could take a delayed revenge on account of their past behaviour. However Joseph confirms his stable ethical condition: 'I do not change my attitude with time, nor, after promising to be faithful, will I ever break the agreement'.[195] Indeed, Joseph in the novel of *J & A* has been seen as a stereotyped character because the hero's understanding is not progressing throughout the story. In the time of the narrative, Joseph has already attained the highest level of knowledge and authority in Egypt, and is portrayed as an unsurpassed ethical model. As philosophical concepts are useful to Philo in order to interpret not only ethical questions, but also historical-cultural conditions Joseph, the hero who obtains a successful career in the foreign land of Egypt is portrayed in ambivalent mode that is, both as the ideal ruler and a man of God interpreter of symbolic dreams and as the emblem of a weaker human soul, which is easily deceived by the allure of success on earth and material goods.

Thus, the concepts of κενὴ δόξα/κενοδοξία that is 'vainglory' or 'false, deceitful opinion', are transferred into allegorical images and personifications identifying characters devoted to material benefits, such as the Pharaoh and in general all the Egyptians. In fact the terms κενὴ δόξα-κενοδοξία also indicate deceitful, ephemeral constructions of the human mind; should one's soul not be able to distinguish dreams and empty opinions from the real life, that human being would be already dead while still alive.[196] Similar considerations take place in the two books about the interpretation of dreams and are related to the story of Joseph and its

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[194]*Jos.*, 86-87.
[195]*Jos.*, 263.
[196]Cf. *De Praemiis et Poenis* 24: significant terms are συνυφαίνω, 'to weave', which is repeatedly employed with words of the sphere of ποικίλος; or γόης, γοητής, the deceiver by means of a beguiling speech, the 'enchanter', and the philosophical-moralising term ἀπάτη. The verb καταποικίλλω is also related to τῦφος.

significance in a political context. The theme receives further development in the treatises on the *Embassy to Gaius* and on *Flaccus*, in which the analogy between a fake, corrupt political activity and performance on the stage is reiterated. The concept of τῦφος is thus expressed in connection to that of θεοπλαστεῖν, 'to create (false) gods', or εἰδωλοπλαστεῖν, 'to forge images', like visions in dreams; the same expressions are in other places related to the concept of ποικίλος as an artful and cunning, but deceitful, construction. Although the Alexandrian philosopher may be read as a commentator of the biblical text rather than as a systematic thinker, the ideas conveyed in his treatises refer to a coherent philosophical view, which is constituted by ethical, religious and spiritual readings.

The description of passions and virtues that is, of the ethical field in *J & A* is similar to Philo of Alexandria's philosophical outlook. Indeed, the motif of arrogance and vainglory is projected on Aseneth, whose initial system of values is depicted as ephemeral as her treasures and costly foods.[197] On the contrary, Joseph can be equalled to the ancient patriarchs represented as standing still in front of God: the words of Joseph, the champion of God, seem peremptory and his decisions unchangeable because he trusts God's design and protection.[198] Moreover, like the three angels of God visiting Abraham in *Genesis* and in Philo's biography of the patriarch, Joseph is offered hospitality in Heliopolis at noon.[199] Provided that a connection can be traced between the biblical episode and this scene of the novel, Pentephres may be portrayed 'between the lines' of the narrative as a new Abraham, thus revealing an innovative perspective in which an Egyptian character or a gentile can attain a certain degree of wisdom, perhaps representing a proselyte. Similarly, Joseph's journey throughout Egypt, the event that opens the narrative of *J & A*, can

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[197] See for example Aseneth's prayer to God at *J & A*, 12.5: κἀγὼ Ἀσενὲθ θυγάτηρ Πεντεφρῆ τοῦ ἱερέως ἡ παρθένος καὶ βασίλισσα, ἥ ποτε σοβαρὰ καὶ ὑπερήφανος καὶ εὐθηνοῦσα ἐν τῷ πλούτῳ μου ὑπὲρ πάντας ἀνθρώπους, νῦν δὲ ὑπάρχω ὀρφανὴ καὶ ἔρημος καὶ ἐγκαταλελειμμένη ἀπὸ πάντων ἀνθρώπων.

[198] See e.g. Joseph's reply to Aseneth who expresses her fear of going to their field of inheritance without him, at *J & A*, 26.1-2: (…) θάρσει καὶ μὴ φοβοῦ, ἀλλὰ πορεύου, διότι κύριος μετὰ σου ἐστι καὶ αὐτὸς διαφυλάξει σε ὡς κόρην ὀφθαλμοῦ ἀπὸ παντὸς πράγματος πονηροῦ.

[199] *J & A*, 3.2: πρὸς σὲ καταλύσω σήμερον, ὅτι ὥρα μεσημβρίας ἐστὶ καὶ ἀρίστου καὶ καῦμα μέγα ἐστὶ τοῦ ἡλίου, καὶ ἵνα ἀναψύξω ὑπὸ τὴν σκιὰν τῆς οἰκίας σου. Cf. *Abr.* 107-118: Abraham's kindness towards the three supposed strangers is contrasted to the Egyptians' uncivilized customs; see *Gen.*, 18.

be read as a significant 'migration' or a sacred pilgrimage which brings spiritual fruits to the land of Egypt and her inhabitants.[200] Therefore, probably in line with Jewish-Hellenistic philosophical conceptions, *J & A* seems to depict the original, primitive wisdom of the patriarchs as a most pure form of knowledge and morality, the grounds of Moses' word codified as Scripture and understood in complex philosophical frameworks.

The novel also depicts both wise positive and negative characters. As already noted, Joseph and Jacob are paradigms of virtue and wisdom, while Pentephres and the Pharaoh may be exemplars of a certain level of wisdom attained by ethical pagans in a milieu of cultural-religious pluralism. The son of Pharaoh plays the role of antagonist in the story; ironically, at the beginning of the events narrated Aseneth states that she wants to marry only the prince, while the reader is informed that he is unsuccessful in his request to obtain Aseneth in marriage from the Pharaoh.[201] In the second part of the novel the son of Pharaoh acts as a real villain, being prey to passions such as fear and grief (πλήρης φόβου καὶ λύπης),[202] he is coward, a liar (ἐψεύσατο)[203], therefore the opposite of the wise man or philosopher and acting like a tyrant during his meeting with Simeon and Levi (κατενύγησαν σφόδρα διότι σχήματι τυραννικῶι ἐλάλησε πρὸς αὐτοὺς ὁ υἱὸς Φαραώ).[204] During the son of Pharaoh's attempt to take the power and gain Aseneth with violence, Dan and Gad may represent members of the Jewish community going astray because they follow hostilities and mendacious tales about the rulers and great men of their nation and fight against God and their fellow-men. They may encounter punishment and revenge, but are eventually saved and forgiven thanks to Aseneth, their 'City of

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[200] *J & A*, 1.1-2: Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ ἔτει τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐτῶν τῆς εὐθηνίας ἐν τῷ μηνὶ τῷ δευτέρῳ πέμπτῃ τοῦ μηνὸς ἐξαπέστειλε Φαραὼ τὸν Ἰωσὴφ κυκλεῦσαι πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν Αἰγύπτου. καὶ ἦλθεν Ἰωσὴφ ἐν τῷ τετάρτῳ μηνὶ τοῦ πρώτου ἔτους ὀκτωκαιδεκάτῃ τοῦ μηνὸς εἰς τὰ ὅρια Ἡλιουπόλεως καὶ συνήγαγε τὸν σῖτον τῆς χώρας ἐκείνης ὡς τὴν ἄμμον τῆς θαλάσσης.
[201] *J & A*, 4.11 and 1.7-8.
[202] *J & A*, 24.1.
[203] *J & A*, 24.7.
[204] *J & A*, 23.6: 'They were provoked exceedingly because the son of Pharaoh had spoken to them in the guise of a tyrant'. Whitmarsh (2011, forthcoming) has read the episode as a celebration of Jewish masculine vigour and wisdom, values embodied by the couple Simeon-Levi; in his opinion every Hellenist can read the scene as a confrontation between a philosopher and a tyrant.

Refuge'. Thus, *J & A* can be defined as an edifying didactic story about Jewish-Christian piety, philanthropy and forgiveness in the name of a superior wisdom, which is conveyed through Aseneth's and Levi's words: 'Never, brother, shall you render evil for evil'(μηδαμῶς, ἀδελφέ, ποιήσεις κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ)[205]; 'Never, brother, shall you commit this act, because we are men revering God and it is not acceptable for a man revering God to render evil for evil' (μηδαμῶς, ἀδελφέ, ποιήσεις τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῦτο, διότι ἡμεῖς ἄνδρες θεοσεβεῖς ἐσμεν καὶ οὐ προσήκει ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖ ἀποδοῦναι κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ).[206]

In conclusion, parallels between J & A and Philo of Alexandria suggest a clever and sophisticated authorship of the novel, which shares points of contact with allegorical commentaries on Scripture. This presupposes an informed expected audience, able to track between different intellectual methodologies, such as those conveyed through biblical narratives and the Jewish (Alexandrian) allegoresis. The fact that Philo the Jewish exegete was involved in contemporary political events points to the interpretation of *J & A* as a 'political novel'.[207] Indeed, as already remarked in passing, *J & A* contains hints at an ideology of power which is sketched in the characterization of its personages and in the positive outcome of Joseph's righteous govern in Egypt. Although the novelistic events are not to be taken as literally as history, the fact that wise deeds are not restricted to the Hebrew characters seems to suggest that the novel conveyed a message of tolerance and respect in a poly-cultural environment. Again, the religious thrust of the novel and the allegory embedded into it support a possible reading of the story in universalistic terms transcending historical boundaries: Joseph's rule stands for the sacred lore and heritage of Israel and will cross ethnic as well as chronological limitations.

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[205] *J & A*, 28.14: Aseneth is addressing Simeon, exhorting him not to harm Dan and Gad who are hiding in the thicket of reeds as she has recommended.

[206] *J & A*, 29.3. Levi defines himself and his people as θεοσεβεῖς men that is, pious and moral men in a general sense, as probably subsequent readers of *J & A* understood. However, it is worth remembering that a religious group in the Hellenistic time is known as the 'God-fearers' (θεοσεβεῖς), gentiles who were close to monotheism and Jewish laws, albeit they did not go as far as becoming converts or proselytes; see e.g. Davila (2005) 23-29.

[207] See Inowlocki (2002) 147-152: Joseph is the emblem of social integration and success in Egypt for the Jews of the Diaspora as contrasted to Moses, who leaves Egypt guiding his people towards the Promised Land.

1.4 Fiction in a Commentary: Parallels between *J & A* and Heraclitus the Allegorist.

The last text I am about to introduce, Heraclitus' treatise *Homeric Problems*, is instructive in order to understand the rhetorical techniques of allegory and its cognate figures, which are employed in the novel of *J & A* without being explicitly codified. In Heraclitus' analysis of the Homeric poems, allegory is an essential instrument for the interpretation of crucial episodes. In fact, to those able to read beyond the literal meaning of the epic stories, Homer reveals ethical-religious senses and scientific knowledge. Thus, descriptions of battles, the apparently unseemly behaviour of the gods in the *Iliad* and Ulysses' adventures in the *Odyssey* illustrate philosophical concepts such as physical elements in reciprocal harmony or contrast, human intellectual faculties in comparison to the pure divine reason, and the journey of the human soul towards virtue and wisdom. Implicitly in its narrative, *J & A* illustrates religious-philosophical concepts, concealing profound senses under the apparently simple love-story. Therefore, both the treatise on *Homeric Problems* by Heraclitus and the Jewish-Hellenistic novel of *J & A* can be considered as witnesses to an educated Hellenism, a complex culture which is interpreted from both pagan and Jewish angles. While Heraclitus' commentary is a literary, erudite testimony of Homeric criticism or revisionism, which was possibly read in schools of rhetoric, *J & A* is a unique example of an *aggadic* tale, the expansion of a biblical story that assumes an independent value for contemporary purposes.[208] Here I suggest that the learned original context of *J & A* did not collide with the rich popular reception of the novel, which is attested in the long and varied history of the tradition throughout the ages.[209]

Little is known about Heraclitus, a grammarian and rhetorician, with eclectic interests in allegorical interpretation and philosophical theories applied to Homer. One of the arguments for dating the treatise in the first/early second century A.D. is the nature of Heraclitus' allegorical technique. According to Donald Russell

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[208]Rajak (2001) 258-259: *aggadah* moves away from the biblical passage, it is an expanded tale for its own sake; this narrative is different from *midrash*, the exegesis of a difficult text.

[209]This pattern is not uncommon in the tradition of Jewish legends; consider for instance the legend of Moses in Ethiopia, which probably had a source before the Jewish historians Artapanus and Josephus recorded it. For a helpful study on 'Moses in Ethiopia', see Rajak (2001).

Heraclitus' allegorical method, being characterized by the 'absence of metaphysical or Neoplatonist allegorising, common later', offers a *terminus ante quem*. Similarly, the 'pretentious, highly metaphorical, non-Atticizing style', might be considered as a clue, although less probative, for establishing a date.[210] In addition, elements of Stoic philosophy can be detected in the Allegorist, such as the traditional division of epistemological research in the three branches of physics, ethics and logic.[211] Although Heraclitus is not a Stoic philosopher, he thought of the Stoics as the most respectable philosophers of his time.[212]

However, in the *Homeric Problems* the author's apologetic purposes and Homer's celebration are expressed through the mysteries' terminology. In fact the imagery reiterates a mystical dimension, referring to practices for the initiates and secret truths ineffable to laymen.[213] Homer as a prophet is deemed to have disclosed secret truths to an elected audience able to understand. Therefore, Heraclitus maintains that all the criticism on the philosophers' part about the literary fiction of the Homeric poems as opposed to the alleged value of ethical-rational thought has to be refuted as a slander. In the following passage, a vehement rhetorical question supports the apologetic purpose of the treatise. Homer is introduced as a minister of

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[210]See Russell in Boys-Stones (2003) 217; 224-225. As a probable sign of Heraclitus' non-conformity to any Atticist trend verbal choices are discussed, such as the use of the word δεισιδαίμων in a positive sense, meaning 'pious', which is a classical usage, but in decline in late antiquity, and only attested in Diodorus and Josephus.

[211]Especially the knowledge of physics is well exemplified, such as the doctrine of transformation in the balance of elements, this causing a lack of harmony and ultimately leading to conflagration or cataclysm (ἐκπύρωσις). See Russell, in Boys-Stones (2003) 217-218 and Pontani (2005) 29-30 for a useful survey and table of the three forms of allegory that is physical, moral and historical, which appear to be blurred or subsumed in Heraclitus. The adjective φυσικός refers to physical allegory and philosophy. The term is important as it recurs several times in various forms, such as the nexus φυσικὴ θεωρία and the corresponding adverb. In Philo these words-concepts are very important, and allegory is presented as a technique which was already used by the 'natural philosophers'. See the *LCL* edition, vol. VI, note *a* at paragraph 99 of the treatise *On Abraham*.

[212]Cf. Heraclitus' own words: 'the most reputed of the philosophers', in *H.P.*, 25.2.

[213]Buffière (1962) XXVI, maintained that in Heraclitus mystical exegesis is absent. This interpretative device seems to be invented by the Neopythagoreans, who read in their philosophical sources signs of the true supernatural reality. However, mystical exegesis also enabled the Neoplatonists to interpret the *Odyssey* as a spiritual journey in their philosophical universe. In this imagery forms of the verb νήχω, recurrent in the *Odyssey*, are used in order to signify the moral shipwreck of material existence, as remarked in Dillon (1981) 183. In the third century A.D. the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus in *Enneads* 1.6 goes further, conflating Odysseus' wanderings with the symbolic journey undertaken by the wise man from the murky realm of the mythical platonic Cave to the light of intelligence; his disciple Porphyry idealizes the figure of the 'man of many devices' when he wants to portray Plotinus' theoretical and human qualities, as well as his own experience of moral sinking and recovering; for an interesting analysis of the Greek passages, cf. Edwards (1988).

divine wisdom, invested with the sacred intermediary role between human knowledge and the superior dimension of heaven.

> After all this, can Homer, the great hierophant of heaven and of the gods, who opened up for human souls the untrodden and closed paths to heaven, deserve to be condemned as impious?[214]

While Heraclitus' literary persona addresses openly an expected readership with apologetic intent, an implicit defensive aim can be detected in *J & A*. Comments on the narrative events are presented as additional given facts in the novel, rather than being explicitly spelled out. Indeed, the cultural outlook of *J & A* is either entrusted to the characters' speeches or embedded in narrative. Thus, contrasting perspectives about Joseph and the people of Israel are conveyed through monologues, dialogues and prayers; symbolic elements in descriptions of the positive characters illustrate their true role and deeds as a confirmation of the words which are uttered in speech. The motif of mendacious denigration against Joseph as a representative of his people in Egypt makes *J & A* the likely testimony of a Hellenistic-Jewish tradition in the centuries at the turn of the era. Obviously, the development of the narrative plot itself shows that all negative accounts about the good people of Israel are false, because the trials and adventures in the story are resolved with Aseneth's miraculous rescue and Joseph's royalty in Egypt. Therefore, *J & A* plays on themes familiar to the audience acquainted with the biblical tradition, while adding innovative elements, significant in its cultural contexts. Two passages of *J & A* contain a negative portrayal of Joseph that is, Aseneth's initial rejection to marry the hero and the son of Pharaoh's untrue account about Joseph's connivance with the Pharaoh in order to get a belated revenge on his brothers.[215]

When Aseneth contradicts Pentephres' words in praise of Joseph, she speaks with arrogance and boldness, as the narrator informs, reporting her father's point of view.[216] Aseneth is presenting an inappropriate portrayal of the hero, wondering why

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[214]Her., *H.P.*, 76.1: Ἆρ' οὖν ἐπὶ τούτοις ὁ μέγας οὐρανοῦ καὶ θεῶν ἱεροφάντης Ὅμηρος, ὁ τὰς ἀβάτους καὶ κεκλεισμένας ἀνθρωπίναις ψυχαῖς ἀτραποὺς ἐπ' οὐρανὸν ἀνοίξας, ἐπιτήδειός ἐστι κατακριθῆναι δυσσεβεῖν, (…) Trans. Russell-Konstan (2005).
[215]*J & A*, 24.1-20.
[216]*J & A*, 4.12: καὶ ἠδέσθε Πεντεφρῆς ἔτι λαλῆσαι τῇ θυγατρὶ αὐτοῦ Ἀσενὲθ περὶ Ἰωσήφ, διότι θρασέως καὶ μετὰ ἀλαζονείας καὶ ὀργῆς ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ.

Pentephres is speaking those words (λαλεῖ... τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα). The slander about Joseph is based on a misinterpretation of the biblical story. The distorted perspective follows the biblical and exegetical information about the grudge which Joseph's brothers held towards the most talented boy, the false accusation of Potiphar's wife about Joseph's attempt at seduction and the hostility which different cultures expressed against the Jews. Thus, Joseph's ability to interpret the significance of dreams is belittled with the statement that even 'old Egyptian women' possess the same gift of magic and dream interpretation. The art of decoding symbols contained in dreams can be associated with the wise man's speech or with divine language which is passed down to men through images and translated into significant human words. The ascription of dream interpretation to the old Egyptian women may signify as well that Egyptian lore is ancient and its culture self-sufficient, thus remarking that the Jews have not brought any relevant discovery.

> Why is my lord and father speaking like that with these words, to hand me over as a captive to a foreign man, a runaway who was sold into slavery? Isn't this the son of the shepherd from the land of Canaan, who was caught in the act of sleeping with his mistress, and his master threw him in the prison of darkness and Pharaoh let him out from the prison because he interpreted his dream, as also the old women of Egypt can do? [217]

In the above passage from *J & A* the art of dream interpretation is mentioned as an ancient cultural prerogative, whereas in Heraclitus the ability to reveal Homeric wisdom, which is presented as a mythical tale, is passed down to the readers as exegetes. On the literal, surface level the Homeric episodes are nothing but fairy-tales. Only when the profound significance of the poems can be grasped by privileged minds Homer is fully understood in the true role as a divine man, a prophet and theologian of heavenly mysteries:

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[217] *J & A*, 4.9-10: ἵνα τί λαλεῖ ὁ κύριός μου καὶ πατήρ μου κατὰ τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα παραδοῦναί με ὡς αἰχμάλωτον ἀνδρὶ ἀλλοφύλῳ καὶ φυγάδι καὶ πεπραμένῳ; οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ποιμένος ἐκ γῆς Χαναὰν καὶ αὐτὸς κατελήφθη ἐπ' αὐτοφώρῳ κοιμώμενος μετὰ τῆς κυρίας αὐτοῦ καὶ ὁ κύριός αὐτοῦ ἐνέβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν φυλακὴν τοῦ σκότους καὶ Φαραὼ ἐξήγαγεν αὐτὸν ἐκ τῆς φυλακῆς καθότι συνέκρινε τὸ ἐνύπνιον αὐτοῦ καθὰ συγκρίνουσι καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες αἱ πρεσβύτεραι τῶν Αἰγυπτίων;

> All these seem to be poetical and miraculous fables, unless some hierophant with heavenly soul can reveal to us Homer's Olympian mysteries.[218]

Allegory is however rooted in archaic poetry. In order to confirm the value of metaphorical imagery which is deftly employed by Homer, Heraclitus cites the works of the archaic poets Archilochus, Alcaeus and Anacreon. These poets represented their social, political and emotional experiences by means of metaphorical descriptions.[219] Archilochus and Alcaeus, as inhabitants of the islands, referred to war and political mobs through the image of a surge in the sea. Alcaeus' allegory of the ship presents the chronicle of a storm from the perspective of the crew struggling onboard while the ship is being torn apart amid the tempest; this allegory became a *topos* to represent political vicissitudes of the State. In Heraclitus' words, Homer is well acquainted with this figurative language, 'using allegories which are neither ambiguous and are not disputed'.[220]

According to Heraclitus, Homer refers to the gods adding a deeper significance to their attributes and deeds. Philo of Alexandria, Jewish philosopher and exegete, adopts a similar approach to interpret the biblical account, identifying in the Hebrew patriarchs the embodiment of virtues and exemplary dispositions of the human soul. Similarly, *J & A* is an allegorical novel because the positive characters assume emblematic roles, becoming figures of ethical-religious virtues, such as conversion or repentance. The underlying senses of the novel are left implicit 'between the lines', so that its significance is conveyed through the allegorical imagery. Heraclitus

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[218]Her., *H.P.*, 64.4 ποιητικοὶ καὶ τεράστιοι μῦθοι δοκοῦσιν, εἰ μή τις οὐρανίῳ ψυχῇ τὰς ὀλυμπίους Ὁμήρου τελετὰς ἱεροφαντήσειε, although Russell-Konstan (2005) remark that Homer should be the hierophant who reveals mysteries, as in § 76, so they conjecture to delete Ὁμήρου or to read Ὅμηρος, and suggest to translate 'if it were not a Homer with heavenly soul who is the hierophant of Olympian mysteries'; however, perhaps there is no contradiction, cf. the conclusion of the treatise, 79.13: 'We are all alike priests and ministers of his divine poetry…' Ἱερεῖς δὲ καὶ ζάκοροι τῶν δαιμονίων ἐπῶν αὐτοῦ πάντες ἐσμὲν ἐξ ἴσου…, which introduces the lines from *Il.*, 2. 346-347.

[219]Archilochus, frg. 54 Bergk= 105 West; Alcaeus, frg. Z2 Page= 326 Lobel and Page; Alcaeus' allegory of the ship, as it is well known, was imitated by Horace, *Carm.* 1. 14, and had a long and widespread fortune in poetry during Humanism and Renaissance. Alcaeus also created an allegory of the vine for an analogous political context, as argued and demonstrated by Vetta (1986). For Anacreon, frg. 417 Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci* (1962): Russell (2005) 11 records in note 3 of text and translation that the fragment is known only from this citation in Heraclitus.

[220]Her., *H.P.*, 5. 14: Ἀλλ' οὐδ' αὐτὸς Ὅμηρος ἀμφιβόλοις ἔσθ' ὅτε καὶ ζητουμέναις ἔτι ταῖς ἀλληγορίαις εὑρίσκεται χρώμενος.

defines allegory stating that in Homer the overall imagery hints at further senses, although there is no strict correspondence between allegorical terms and their value. Indeed, like the Ps.-Plutarch of the *Life and Poetry of Homer*, Heraclitus states that allegorical strategies embedded in the Homeric poems indicate a 'common linguistic praxis', and a method of communication which was originally devised by the author, rather than representing the reader's possibility to decode the true meaning of the text.[221] In addition, the poets' paradigm turns out to be a useful means for Heraclitus to justify a philosophical interpretation of Homeric characters and episodes.[222] In the Homeric poems gods and heroes embody physical and ethical principles, so that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* represent sources of knowledge and wisdom, which are meant to impart teachings of high moral value.[223] Following a trend of ancient literary criticism, Heraclitus defines the *Iliad* as 'the poem of strife and war', the *Odyssey* as 'the poem of moral character'.[224] Similarly, the author of the *Life and Poetry of Homer* declares, after a summary of the epic plot, that in the *Iliad* the poet 'is presenting physical prowess, in the *Odyssey* the nobility of the soul'.[225] The ethical

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[221] Lucchetta, in Ramelli-Lucchetta (2004) 406; Ps.-Plut., *De Hom.*, 92: παρὰ δ' Ὁμήρῳ σιωπώμενόν ἐστι τὸ τοιοῦτο γένος τῆς διδασκαλίας, ἔχον δ' ἀναθεώρησιν ὠφέλιμον ἐπὶ τῶν διαβεβλημένων μάλιστα μύθων, οὕς ταῖς πάλαι μὲν ὑπονοίαις, ἀλληγορίαις δὲ νῦν λεγομέναις παραβιαζόμενοι…; for the notion of Homer as the source of all knowledge and wisdom, cf. § 6, where it is stated that Homer laid the starting points for subsequent prose writers and their historical-theoretical compositions.

[222] In fact, the so-called 'rhetorical allegory', which has been ascribed to the Alexandrian philologists and the speculative exegesis which was applied to the Homeric text by the Pergamene school of thought, seem to be conflated in Heraclitus' treatise. Of course, it would be too bold to try and gauge Heraclitus' awareness of the methodological-conceptual difference between the two practices. Cf. Cucchiarelli (1997) 210-214 quotes Eustathius' remarks on Aristarchus' philological methodology, which was meant to go hand in hand with the authors' poetical intention; cf. schol. D *Il.*, 5.385: Ἀρίσταρχος ἀξιοῖ τὰ φραζόμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ ποιητοῦ μυθικώτερον ἐκδέχεσθαι κατὰ τὴν ποιητικὴν ἐξουσίαν, μηδὲν ἔξω τῶν φραζομένων ὑπὸ τοῦ ποιητοῦ περιεργαζομένους, 'Aristarchus thought that it was appropriate to receive the words devised by the poet as rather legendary according to the poetical license, and that they did not overdo with anything apart from the (very) words which were devised by the poet'. The school of Pergamum was influenced by Stoicism, practiced allegoresis and had Crates of Mallos as its main representative.

[223] In literary criticism, allegory can be defined on the basis of the author's intention: thus 'strong allegory' means that the author of a work is purposefully composing an allegorical discourse in the form of a literary fiction or myth, or is thought to do so by later commentators, such as Heraclitus; cf. Pontani (2005) 30 for a definition of 'strong' (or 'authorial') allegorist. A second form of allegory presupposes that allegorical interpretation is applied and further significance is built up by later thinkers, philosophers, and more generally readers, on the original text.

[224] Her., *H. P.*, 60.2, which is a formula of passage from the analysis of the *Iliad* to that of the *Odyssey*.

[225] Ps.-Plut., *De Hom.*, 4. In rhetoric tradition, the *Iliad* is associated with πάθος, like tragedy is characterized by strong emotions; the *Odyssey* becomes the poem of ἦθος, more similar to 'domestic

content of the *Odyssey* is acknowledged as an ethical picture of humanity which is the opposite of philosophies inspired by the Platonic and Epicurean heritage.

> In Homer, everything is full of noble virtue: Odysseus is wise, Ajax brave, Penelope chaste, Nestor invariably just, Telemachus dutiful to his father, Achilles totally loyal to his friendships. [226]

The Homeric characters' unswerving virtue is presented as a didactic notion for contemporary society. Ethics is seen as the cohesive element in the ideal civic community, which is based on both private and social bonds, like in the ideal Greek novels. Accordingly, Heraclitus defines Homer as a 'painter of human passions', thus comparing poetry with mimetic art. The expression seems to recall subtly Platonic terminology, although its meaning is opposite to Plato's criticism of art as a deceitful copy of the immanent reality, therefore imitation of the sensible world, which is in its turn the first copy of the immutable world of the Ideas:

> So Homer is, as it were, a painter of human passions, attaching the names of gods allegorically to things that happen to us. [227]

As already remarked, in the ancient Greek and Hellenistic world poetry was credited with fundamental educative value. According to Heraclitus, Homer is the greatest poet, suitable for all the human ages, both within the boundaries of a lifetime and in the history of humankind. In the opening section of the treatise, Homer is the source of education for children at school, and the poems are metaphorically compared to small children's swaddling clothes.[228] The poet remains a companion during youth and the passage to adult age; even in old age it is not possible to be weary of the poems.

> In a word, the only end of Homer for human beings is the end of life.[229]

While the needs of Homer's readers vary according to subsequent phases in life, the poems convey significant content throughout historical ages and human generations.

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comedy', with the 'loss of vigour in old age', e. g. in Long., *subl.*, 9.13-15, as explained by Innes (1995), 326-327.

[226]Her., *H.P.*, 78.2-3.

[227]Her., *H.P.*, 37.

[228]Her., *H.P.*, 1.5; see Russell-Konstan (2005) 3, n. 6: the expression ἐνεσπαργανωμένοι reminds the reader of Longinus, *de subl.*, 44.3, which is a complaint about the moral-intellectual decay of the author's contemporary age.

[229]Her., *H.P.*, 1.7. Lucchetta, in Ramelli-Lucchetta (2004) 404, remarks that the argument establishes an absolute adherence between Homeric and existential experience, denoting Homer's humanism.

Thus, the allegorical interpretation of the poems can be exerted, so to speak, both in the microcosm of human life and in the macrocosm of society. Heraclitus' contemporary age is sketched out as a still glorious time if Homer's imperishable wisdom can be well received according to its truthful sense.[230] In this connection, a meta-literary consideration may be illustrated in the analysis of the encounter between Telemachus and Athena. The goddess assumes the appearance of old Mentes, embodying Telemachus' coming of age in the figure of the wise host in Odysseus' house. The following comment is valid for both the Homeric poems and for Homer's ancient readers.

> Grey hairs and age are the sacred haven of our last days, a safe anchorage for humankind, where the strength of the mind increases as the force of the body wanes.[231]

Heraclitus implies that his role as a commentator of Homer assumes further significance if it is compared with the purpose of the poems. As the *Odyssey* follows the *Iliad*, completing a meaningful design, Heraclitus' authorial persona continues Homer's program in the education of both his contemporaries and subsequent generations according to the Hellenic ideals of knowledge and ethical precepts. Consequently, the memory and glory which are reserved to the poet throughout the ages attest that Homeric wisdom is ever unsurpassed; therefore, the poems never grow old or irrelevant for those possessing the key to interpret Homer's hallowed truth. The theme of speech in praise of a worthy figure, in this case Homer the greatest poet of Greece and the inhabited world, signifies the hallowed value of the poems.

> Homer's wisdom (σοφίαν), by contrast, the whole course of the ages (αἰὼν ὁ σύμπας) has deified. Time passes, but his charms stay young. No one opens his mouth to speak of him but in praise.[232]

The theme of unsurpassed antiquity and imperishable value of the Homeric poems finds its counterpart in the conception which Hellenistic Jews held of the holy books. In historical works and philosophical commentaries written by Jewish

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[230]Her., *H.P.*, 61.5.
[231]Her., *H.P.*, 61.5.
[232]Her., *H.P.*, 79.12. The contrast is established with the philosopher Epicure and his aftermath.

intellectuals ancient Hebrew lore is treated as sacred knowledge from times immemorial, which was passed down to humans through Moses the lawgiver's intermediary role. In Jewish-Hellenistic traditions, Moses becomes a legendary figure, the archetype of the wise philosopher and master of all knowledge, including an innate predisposition for the Greek language and literature, which is an obvious anachronism. [233] Greek intellectuals, for their part, envisioned Jewish traditions through the perspective of Hellenic philosophies.[234] As an allegorical text, *J & A* expresses analogous concepts in narrative mode. For instance, Jacob's portrayal illustrates the superior value of Jewish culture, ancient but still flourishing in the author's contemporary time. Significantly, the old Patriarch is called both by his human name, Jacob, and by the divine name which was given to him by an emissary of God. In fact, Israel signifies at the same time the whole symbolic nation of the Jews, the elected people sharing the same religious precept in the dispersion. Jacob's old age may be a representation in descriptive-narrative mode of the ancient Hebrew people and their sacred Law. Whereas Heraclitus states that old age enhances intellectual strengths in compensation for physical decay, Jacob's amazing beauty is stressed in the novel as a reflection of inner wisdom and foreknowledge which Aseneth can detect at first glance.

The physical details in the portrayal are symbolic rather than realistic; as in Aseneth's first description, the adjective ὡραίος hints at the character's full maturity that is readiness for virtue and the word of God. Jacob's angelic traits include the dazzling white of his hair, which signifies his old age transcending the earthly time, and the uncommon brightness of his eyes, which reminds the reader of the man from heaven in *J & A*. The focus on Jacob's limbs connects the portrayal to the biblical account of Genesis 32, explaining at the same time why Jacob looks 'like a man who had wrestled with God' (ὡς ἄνθρωπος ὃς ἐπάλαισε μετὰ θεοῦ). In fact, as the biblical story goes, during the journey which he had to undertake on the western side of the river Jordan to flee from his angry brother Esau, Jacob experienced a mystical encounter with an angelic figure one night and had to wrestle with him. Apparently

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[233]See e. g. the tradition in Philo, *On Moses*, 1.21-24.
[234] Gruen (2009) 134.

the heavenly emissary could not defeat Jacob and had to depart at dawn, so he wrenched Jacob's tight, leaving him lame, and refused to disclose his name, while he announced Jacob's new name of Israel, 'the man who was strong/survived in front of the Lord'.

As we shall see in more precise detail in the next chapter, the fragmentary *Prayer of Joseph* presents in Jacob's direct speech the double nature of the Patriarch so that Jacob identifies the man on earth, while Israel is the name of the angel in heaven. The fragmentary pseudepigraphon is likely to attest a specific, more elaborate conception of heavenly hierarchies as compared to the novel, because Jacob recounts how he could recognize in his divine adversary the angel Uriel and state his place in the rank of God. In the novel, Jacob seems to possess analogous omniscience when he predicts Aseneth's blessed state on account of God the Most High.

> And they (*sc.* Joseph and Aseneth) went in to Jacob. And Israel was sitting on his bed, and he was an old man in comfortable old age (αὐτὸς ἦν πρεσβύτης ἐν γήρει λιπαρῷ). And Aseneth saw him and was amazed at his beauty (καὶ εἶδεν αὐτὸν Ἀσενὲθ καὶ ἐθαμβήθη ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει αὐτοῦ), because Jacob was exceedingly beautiful to look at (καλὸς τῷ εἴδει), and his old age (was) like the youth of a handsome (young) man (ἀνδρὸς ὡραίου), and his head was all white as snow (πᾶσα λευκὴ ὡσεὶ χιὼν), and the hairs of his head were all exceedingly close and thick like (those) of an Ethiopian, and his beard (was) white reaching down to his breast, and his eyes (were) flashing and darting (flashes of) lightning (χαροποιοὶ καὶ ἐξαστράπτοντες), and his sinews and his shoulders and his arms were like those of an angel (ὡς ἀγγέλου), and his thighs and his calves and his feet like (those) of a giant. And Jacob was like a man who had wrestled with God (ὡς ἄνθρωπος ὃς ἐπάλαισε μετὰ θεοῦ). And Aseneth saw him and was amazed, and prostrated herself before him face down to the ground. And Jacob said to Joseph: 'Is this my daughter-in-law, your wife? Blessed she will be by the Most High God'.[235]

If we return to Heraclitus' treatise, we shall find mystical traits in the description of Homeric allegory. Indeed, Homer is a discoverer of sacred things, as well as a skilled poet-craftsman, expert in the use of language. Thus allegory in the two epics works as a rhetorical technique.

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[235] *J & A*, 22.7-9.

> This too is not quite without philosophical meaning. Homer, we discover, is much the same in both epics, not telling disreputable tales of the gods, but giving enigmatic hints (αἰνιττόμενον) by means of the technique (διὰ δὲ τῆς τοιαύτης ἐμπειρίας) we have been studying.[236]

It is noteworthy that, going further the apologetic purpose, Heraclitus considers Homer as a polymath and the archetype of the wise philosopher. Indeed, from this perspective, philosophers drew their theories from Homer, the universal source of all knowledge and wisdom.

> As the originator of all wisdom (ἀρχηγὸς δὲ πάσης σοφίας) Homer has, by using allegory (ἀλληγορικῶς), passed down to his successors the power of drawing from him, piece by piece, all the philosophy he was the first to discover.[237]

In order to demonstrate that Homer inspired Plato to formulate the theory of the threefold soul, Heraclitus introduces the Platonic *Phaedrus*.[238] In the dialogue Plato illustrates his psychological theory with the allegorical image of the charioteer or rational part of the soul striving to guide two horses, symbols of opposite dispositions of the soul, the one obedient and inclining towards rational choices, the other one rebellious and prey to material appetites.[239] Heraclitus reads the episode of the first book of the *Iliad*, in which Athena restrains Achilles from slaying Agamemnon, as the archetypal representation of the human mind which is led by the reasoning faculty.[240] Moreover, Achilles' change of heart is described as a recovering or a return to his senses, thus following the imagery of moral health/sickness which is recurrent in philosophical-moralising texts, such as the *Tabula Cebetis* and Philo of Alexandria's treatises.

> He (*sc.* Homer) gives us the episode of Athena as an allegorical confirmation of this doctrine. For when Achilles, bursting with anger, reached for his sword, and the reason residing in his head was eclipsed by the passions in his breast, his mind was gradually freed from the intoxication that irritated it, and recovered its sobriety and better state. This change of heart due to sane thinking is very properly identified in the poem with Athena.[241]

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[236]Her., *H.P.*, 60.
[237]Her., *H.P.*, 34. 8; cf. 22. 2.
[238]Her., *H.P.*, 18.1 and cf. Ps.-Long., *subl.* 13.3.
[239]Her., *H. P.*, 17.5-12, quoting *Phaed.*, 253D-E.
[240]*Il.*, 1.194-200.
[241]Her., *H.P.*, 19.5-7

Athena is a seer, the embodiment of pure virtue and wisdom, acting as the divine mediator between the two leaders of the Achaean army; as a healer or the personification of a drug (φάρμακον), she enacts Achilles' change of heart:

> She is simply wisdom in perfection. And that is why, when the fire of anger blazed in Achilles, she stood over him, a remedy (as it were) to quench the evil, ὥσπερ τι σβεστήριον κακοῦ φάρμακον ἐπέστη.[242]

Therefore, Heraclitus compares the vivid image of Athena gripping Achilles' hair to prevent him from slaying Agamemnon with the *Phaedrus*'s allegory of the charioteer pulling the bridles to direct the two horses on the right course. In the metaphor, Achilles' negative passion (θυμός) is frightened and assuaged in front of repentance, when 'wisdom takes firm hold of his head':

> His fearlessness, never dismayed in the face of any danger, took fright at the vision of a reasoned repentance. Realizing the scale of the disaster into which he had nearly tumbled, he took good head of the reason that stood over him, his 'charioteer', as it were.[243]

In conclusion to the analysis of the Homeric passage, Heraclitus remarks the allegorical reading of the Achilles-Athena episode through the Platonic theory of the soul as it is exposed in the *Phaedrus*, while claiming that Plato learnt all that knowledge from Homer.

> The episode of Athena, whom Homer represents as the mediator in Achilles' anger against Agamemnon, may thus be seen to merit an allegorized interpretation.[244]

Like the complex figure of Athena in Heraclitus' reading, the man from heaven in *J & A* is not only the typical divine envoy of traditional Jewish and Christian annunciation scenes. Indeed, I suggest that the heavenly messenger is both introduced as Joseph's angelic counterpart and as the allegorical representation of the divine Logos, which exerts its transforming effect on Aseneth's rational faculty. Interestingly, Homeric poetry is a concealed inter-text in this episode of the novel: a literary reference to a formulaic verse recurrent in Homer is in fact expressed in the

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[242]Her., *H.P.*, 20.1-2.
[243]Her., *H.P.*, 20.5-7.
[244]Her., *H.P.*, 20.12.

description of the angel's arrival, when he stands on Aseneth's head: καὶ ἦλθε πρὸς αὐτὴν ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἔστη ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς Ἀσενέθ. καὶ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτὴν καὶ εἶπεν· » Ἀσενέθ, Ἀσενέθ.« The Homeric reminiscence is so to speak halved, because in Homer a formulaic verse describing a divine apparition or visions in dreams would be στῆ δ' ἄρ' ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς καὶ μιν πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν, as in *Odyssey* IV.803. The reminiscence of a Homeric verse in *J & A* seems to me particularly significant in order to propose a learned authorship of the novel in a Hellenistic context. Indeed, early phases in the tradition of *J & A* may have been closer to a Jewish-Hellenistic commentary on scriptural episodes, although the present state of the novel's textual transmission cannot provide enough evidence for a secure statement.

Moreover, the formulaic verse from the *Odyssey* which reminds us of the man from heaven's position on Aseneth's head refers not only to a supernatural apparition, because it also introduces an episode which contains further analogies with *J & A* as well as with Heraclitus' interpretation of the Homeric poems. In fact, Iphthime's *eidolon* which appears as a vision in a dream to her sister Penelope is sent by Athena to soothe Penelope's sorrow. In *J & A*, a Homeric allusion and biblical language are combined in a fascinating mixture.[245] As the focus on Aseneth's head is repeated, it is feasible to surmise that a blend of philosophical and religious values is added to the scene of the mystical encounter with the man from heaven. According to Heraclitus' philosophical interpretation of the Athena-Achilles' episode, Homer was the first sage to know that in the head resides the sound rational faculty. If the author(s) of *J & A* held a similar conception, this was embedded in its narrative and imagery. In fact, Joseph pronounces the prayer of blessing for Aseneth keeping his right hand on her head,[246] while the man from heaven first refers to Aseneth's head when he exhorts her to remove her veil, because on that day she has become a saint virgin, and her head is like that of a youth.[247] After she has found the honeycomb in

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[245] *J & A*, 14.3-4.

[246] *J & A*, 8.9: καὶ ἐπῆρε τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ τὴν δεξιὰν καὶ ἔθηκεν ἐπάνω τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς καὶ εἶπεν… And (Joseph) raised his right hand and put it upon her head and said…

[247] *J & A*, 15.1: καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος· »ἀπόστειλον δὴ τὸ θέριστρον ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς σου. καὶ ἵνα τί σὺ τοῦτο πεποίηκας; διότι σὺ εἶ παρθένος ἁγνὴ σήμερον καὶ ἡ κεφαλή

her room, Aseneth points out to the angel that the honeycomb must have come into being because it has been evoked by his holy word; hearing that true observation, the man from heaven smiles and strokes Aseneth's head signifying approval and blessing.[248] In these scenes, gestures assume a solemn, evocative value.

> And the man smiled at Aseneth's understanding and called her to himself and outstretched his right hand to take hold of her head and he shook her head with his right hand. [249]

The focus on specific parts of the human body seems to signify that both Joseph and the man from heaven use their hands like physicians or healers to enhance the inner transformation which is happening in Aseneth's soul. This interpretation is paralleled in the analysis of the Athena-Achilles episode according to Heraclitus. Indeed, Achilles' change of mind is likened to a recovering from an intoxication which temporarily affected sound reason in the hero. Achilles feels shame when his consciousness, which is symbolized by Athena, comes back;[250] the angry part of his soul is frightened in front of the rational advice, so that the hero experiences μετάνοια and 'wisdom takes firm hold of his head'. Aseneth seems to experience a similar pattern: her change of heart is represented as a sequence of emotional states and physical reactions, passing from anger and disappointment in her speech to Pentephres to a mixture of fear, sorrow, regret and hope after she has seen Joseph. At first, her regret for not knowing Joseph's true nature is expressed as shame and fear in her monologue.[251] The tag of ἄφρων, 'foolish, inconsiderate',

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σού ἐστιν ὡς ἀνδρὸς νεανίσκου« And the man said: 'Remove the veil from your head. Why indeed have you done this? In fact you are a saint virgin today and your head is like that of a youth'.

[248] *J & A*, 16.11-13: καὶ ἐφοβήθη Ἀσενέθ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· »κύριε, ἐγὼ οὐκ εἶχον κηρίον μελί<σσης> ἐν τῷ <ταμιείῳ> μου πώποτε, ἀλλὰ σὺ ἐλάλησας καὶ γέγονε. Μήτιγε τοῦτο ἐκ τοῦ στόματός σου ἐξῆλθε, διότι ἡ πνοὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς πνοὴ τοῦ στόματός σού ἐστιν; And Aseneth was caught by fear and said to him: 'Lord, I have never had a honeycomb in my room, but you spoke and it has come into being. Did it not come out of your mouth, because its breath is like the breath of your mouth?'

[249] *J & A*, 16.13. καὶ ἐμειδίασεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ τῇ συνέσει Ἀσενέθ καὶ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτὴν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐξέτεινε τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ τὴν δεξιὰν καὶ ἐκράτησε τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπέσεισε τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ τῇ δεξιᾷ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς.

[250] *Her.*, *H.P.*, 20.5-6, referring to *Il.*, 1.199.

[251] *J & A*, 6.2-3: Τί νῦν ἐγὼ ποιήσω ἡ ταλαίπωρος; (…) ἐγὼ δὲ ἄφρων καὶ θρασεῖα ἐξουδένωσα αὐτὸν καὶ ἐλάλησα ῥήματα πονηρὰ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ ᾔδειν ὅτι Ἰωσὴφ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστιν. 'What shall I do now, me miserable woman? (…) I, foolish and arrogant, despised him and spoke offensive words about him, and I did not know that Joseph is a son of God.'

which Aseneth uses to describe herself in a self-deprecatory lament can be significantly contrasted to her acquisition of a superior wisdom. The comparison with Heraclitus' treatise indicates that *J & A* shares the language which illustrates the heroine's 'change of heart' with pagan Hellenistic literature. The process of Aseneth's repentance and mourning is initially described with the symptoms of love-sickness and strong, contrasting emotions, as in a Greek erotic novel. Again, Hellenic linguistic modes and biblical expressions are merged. By way of example, the formula 'to rejoice of a great joy' is typical of the Septuagint, the Greek-Hellenistic version of the Bible, but when χαρὰ, 'joy' is combined with its antonym in the expression χαρὰ καὶ λύπη, the language becomes very close to that of the Greek pagan novels. In addition, there is a famous Homeric antecedent for the phrase, indeed the touching scene of Euriclea's recognition of Odysseus from the scar on his knee: τὴν δ'ἄμα χάρμα καὶ ἄλγος ἕλε φρένα, τὼ δέ οἱ ὄσσε/δακρυόφιν πλῆσθεν, θαλερὴ δέ οἱ ἔσχετο φωνή.[252] Although the 'conflict of emotions' is featured through recurrent and more complex instances in the Greek erotic novels, as Massimo Fusillo has shown, the concise example in *J & A* points to another literary parallel with the erotic novel in antiquity.[253]

> And Aseneth rejoiced (ἐχάρη) a lot over Joseph's blessing of a great joy (χαρὰν μεγάλην) and in haste she went up to the penthouse on her own and she cast herself on her bed, enfeebled because joy and sorrow (χαρὰ καὶ λύπη) were in her and a lot of fear and trembling and continuous sweating because she heard all the words which Joseph spoke to her in the name of God the Most High. And she wept with violent and bitter sobbing and she was repenting (μετενόει) from the gods which she revered and deplored all the idols; so she was waiting for the evening to fall.[254]

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[252] See *Od.*, 19.471-472. 'Joy and sorrow seized her in her heart, her eyes filled with tears, and her voice came out fast…'

[253] Fusillo (1999) esp. 69-70: Artaxerxes' conflict of emotions in *Callirhoe*, 8.5.8; Callirhoe's emotions when she can hear the pirates opening the tomb in which she has been buried alive are similar to Aseneth's various states of mind: Καλλιρόην κατελάμβανεν ὁμοῦ πάντα, φόβος, χαρά, λύπη, θαυμασμός, ἐλπίς, ἀπιστία, 'Callirhoe was gripped by a variety of emotions-fear, joy, grief, surprise, hope, disbelief' (I.9.3). It is noteworthy that the verb μετανοέω is used in *J & A* to indicate Aseneth's rejection of the idols, but the same verbal form occurs in the romance of *Callirhoe* to express King Artaxexes' regret for having sent his rival Chaereas to a war in which the protagonist wins his wife back.

[254] *J & A*, 9.1-2: Καὶ ἐχάρη Ἀσενέθ ἐπὶ τῇ εὐλογίᾳ τοῦ Ἰωσὴφ χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα καὶ ἔσπευσε καὶ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸ ὑπερῷον πρὸς ἑαυτὴν καὶ πέπτωκεν ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης αυτῆς

The analysis of possible conceptual similarities/points of contact between Heraclitus' commentary on Homer and the Jewish novel of *J & A* may support my view of the novel as a complex text, dense with literary references and allegorical senses. *J & A* can be considered as a testimony of Greek-speaking Judaism in the centuries at the turn of the era because religion is combined with allegory and philosophy in the apparently plain narrative. Heraclitus' allegorical interpretation of the *Odyssey* in ethical terms allows for a fruitful comparison of pagan and Jewish-Christian religious texts on account of their allegorical devices. Odysseus' wanderings are defined by Heraclitus as allegorical.[255] Moreover, in the commentary Odysseus becomes an 'instrument of every virtue', in contrast to the Greek classical traditions which depicted the hero as a cunning character, whom curiosity and love of power led to incur in dangerous adventures with his companions; in Attic tragedies Odysseus is even represented as the embodiment of unscrupulous political power. [256] On the contrary, Heraclitus depicts the hero 'of many devices' (πολύτροπος) as the emblem of Homer's philosophy. The renowned poet is deemed to possess true philosophical knowledge, which starts from human virtue and aversion for all vices.

Like Odysseus, Joseph goes through a process of metamorphosis in the passage to different literary traditions. In *Genesis* Joseph is indeed elected by God and the favourite son of Jacob, an interpreter of dreams and faithful servant, while he is also shrewd and cunning enough to test his brothers in Egypt when they have to deal with him as a foreign ruler, without recognizing at first the boy they sold into slavery. In other words, the biblical story presents Joseph concealing his identity and playing

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ἀσθενοῦσα διότι ἦν ἐν αὐτῇ χαρὰ καὶ λύπη καὶ φόβος πολὺς καὶ τρόμος καὶ ἱδρὼς συνεχὴς ὡς ἤκουσε πάντα τὰ ῥήματα Ἰωσὴφ ὅσα ἐλάλησεν αὐτῇ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου. καὶ ἔκλαυσε κλαυθμῷ μεγάλῳ καὶ πικρῷ καὶ μετενόει ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν αὐτῆς ὧν ἐσέβετο καὶ προσώχθισε τοῖς εἰδώλοις πᾶσι καὶ περιέμενε τοῦ γενέσθαι ἐσπέραν.

[255]Her., *H.P.*, 70.1.

[256]E.g. in Eur., *Hec.*, vv. 218-401: Odysseus demands Polyxena's sacrifice on behalf of the Achaean army. Queen Hecuba tries to plead Odysseus to spare her daughter on account of her mercy towards the hero, when he entered Troy in disguise as a spy and was recognized by Helen; Polyxena is ready to die a noble death and be free. Cf. Hecuba's desperate speech, against political leaders, vv. 254-257: 'An ungrateful lot you all are, who want to be political leaders! Never may you be acquaintances of mine! You do not care that you harm your friends provided that you say something to gratify the crowd!'

tricks to his brothers in order to trial their reactions; the hero even sends Simeon to prison as a hostage and hides his precious divination-cup in Benjamin's sack faking theft on the boy's part. Although in the biblical narrative these elements can be defined as novelistic and Joseph is never judged ethically for his clever means to discover the truth, later commentaries attempt to justify the forefather's conduct. *J & A* may follow the apologetic trend of rabbinical tracts and Jewish folktales, making Joseph an ethical model; the hero's steadfast virtue is only questioned in Aseneth's view, which proves to be wrong, and in the son of Pharaoh's mendacious account. By quoting the biblical verses which mention Joseph and Aseneth, the novel points out that tradition is respected accurately, while another true story is built on the same biblical passages. As already noted, the roles credited to Joseph are also noteworthy: his journeys throughout the land of Egypt to collect the crop qualify the hero as the saviour of Pharaoh's kingdom, whereas the royal power he takes over assumes the literary function to legitimize the Jewish status in Egypt on account of the ancestor's sacred rule. In fact, Joseph in the novel is the flawless son of Jacob-Israel, of Pharaoh and of God Himself.

In Heraclitus, the exotic lands which Odysseus visited or passed by, the perils encountered, such as the monsters Scylla and Charybdis, and the divine or semi-divine beings trying to obstacle or detain Odysseus in his journey stand for representations of moral vices, for instance pleasure and intemperance. For this reason, Heraclitus explains, Odysseus decided not to dwell with the Lotophagi, 'cultivators of exotic delights', whereas he wanted to listen to the Sirens' song, 'learning from them the varied history of all ages'.[257] The hero's fierce deeds are also interpreted allegorically: by making the Cyclops blind with the sharpened, smouldering tree, Odysseus signifies that human anger, of which the Cyclops is a representation, needs to be 'cauterized' like a wound.[258] In much the same way Charybdis, the terrible vortex in the sea, a fatal danger for sailors, is an image for

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[257]Her., *H.P.*, 70.3: Ἡδονὴν μέν γε, τὸ Λωτοφάγων χωρίον, ξένης γεωργῶν ἀπολαύσεως, [ἣν] Ὀδυσσεὺς ἐγκρατῶς παρέπλευσεν; 70.9: Ἔτι δὲ Σειρήνων ἀκούει, τὰς πολυπείρους ἱστορίας παντὸς αἰῶνος ἐκμαθών/ἐκμανθάνων (Russell).

[258]Her., *H.P.*, 70.5 Κύκλωψ δὲ οὗτος ὠνόμασται, ὁ τοὺς λογισμοὺς ὑποκλωπῶν. Etymology, a rhetorical figure which can be allied of allegory, is here employed to explain the role of the Cyclops as 'he who *steals away*' human powers of reasoning.

'extravagant luxury and insatiable drinking', while monstrous Scylla is depicted with many dog's heads because she is the embodiment of multiform shamelessness.[259] Similarly, Circe's drugs, containing the power to transform men into animals, symbolize indulgence to pleasures and intemperance; Odysseus is able to get over the enchantress' potion by means of his wisdom. By contrast the cattle of the sun, which Odysseus refuses to harm and eat, represent 'temperance in eating, for Odysseus did not even regard hunger as a compelling reason to do wrong'.[260] The survey of allegorical places in the *Odyssey* is concluded by Heraclitus' comment on Homer's technique and moral intention. Again, the pleasant literary fiction of the Homeric poetry is recognized as complementary of the deeper sense of the epics.

> These things are told as fables for the sake of the audience; but if one penetrates deeply into the wisdom which they represent allegorically, they will be found very useful to the initiated.[261]

After this programmatic statement, Heraclitus goes back to the exegesis of passages and characters of the *Odyssey*. The Circe episode is a paradigmatic attempt to understand Homer's ethical thrust. In fact, the enchantress' draught is interpreted as a 'cup of pleasure', which leads men to moral wreck. Odysseus is immune to the effects of the potion thanks to upright reasoning.

Heraclitus' interpretation of Homeric divinities and monsters develops the figurative value of descriptions and narrative according to allegorical keys, whereas symbolic elements are embedded in the setting of *J & A*. Aseneth's precious objects and the rich food which is stored in her penthouse may give the novel an 'exotic', Eastern colour that is, traits of excessive delight according to Heraclitus' and in general Hellenic perspective. Although these descriptions of foreign luxury[262] have parallels in biblical episodes as well as in the ancient novels, in *J & A realia* are assembled to illustrate significant concepts. In addition, Heraclitus' statement that Homeric poetry is on the surface a fairy-tale, which conveys a deeper truth by means

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[259] Her., *H.P.*, 70.10-11: Charybdis rightly embodies δάπανος ἀσωτία καὶ περὶ πότους ἄπληστος, Scylla τὴν πολύμορφον ἀναίδειαν ἠλληγόρησε…
[260] Her., *H.P.*, 70.12: Αἱ δ' ἡλίου βόες ἐγκράτεια γαστρός εἰσιν, εἰ μηδὲ λιμὸν ἔσχεν ἀδικίας ἀνάγκην.
[261] Her., *H.P.*, 70.13.
[262] *J & A*, 2.3.

of allegorical representation for those able to detect it, can be applied to the unexpressed program of *J & A*. If we consider the description of the three rooms in the tower where Aseneth lives as a maiden, we shall notice that symbolic elements are blended with merely decorative features. Thus, the countless gold and silver effigies of Egyptian gods may be contrasted to the immeasurable crop which Joseph is collecting in the time of plenty by means of the expression οὐκ ἦν ἀριθμὸς.[263] In addition, Aseneth is presented as a pious worshipper of her idols, which she reveres out of sacred fear: καὶ πάντας ἐκείνους ἐσέβετο Ἀσενὲθ καὶ ἐφοβεῖτο αὐτοὺς καὶ θυσίας αὐτοῖς ἐπετέλει καθ' ἡμέραν; 'and Aseneth revered them (the gods of gold and silver) and was afraid of them and offered sacrifices to them every day'. This religious quality connects Aseneth to Joseph and the positive characters, while the son of Pharaoh and part of Joseph's brothers illustrate the paradigm of human beings fighting against God.[264]

In Heraclitus' treatise, Odysseus' wisdom is personified in the god Hermes, the divine messenger who appears and speaks to the hero before he enters Circe's house. An excursus offers a detailed portrayal of Hermes, with the traditional attributes of the divinity. Hermes' symbolic statues are usually placed at crossroads, square figures to signify the secure stability of reason, which 'does not slip and roll from one side to the other'.[265] Painters and sculptors represent Hermes with wings, as a symbol of the speed of speech. Furthermore, etymologies of Hermes' name and epithets become allies of visual arts to identify the god's role. In fact, Hermes means 'interpreter' (ἑρμηνεύς), 'of everything conceived in the mind'.[266] In this interpretation, Hermes' epithet *Argheiphontes* is explained not as 'slayer of Argos', the guardian of the nymph Io, as traditional myth purports, but according to the

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[263] Cf. *J & A*, 1.2: ...καὶ ἦν συνάγων τὸν σῖτον τῆς χώρας ἐκείνης ὡς τὴν ἄμμον τῆς θαλάσσης, which seems to be a concise adaptation of the biblical passage in Genesis, 41.49: Καὶ συνήγαγεν Ἰωσὴφ σῖτον ὡσεὶ τὴν ἄμμον τῆς θαλάσσης πολὺν σφόδρα, ἕως οὐκ ἠδύνατο ἀριθμηθῆναι, οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἀριθμός.

[264] *J & A*, 4.7: Pentephres introduces Joseph to Aseneth as a man θεοσεβὴς καὶ σώφρων καὶ παρθένος; cf. *J & A*, 8.5-7: at their first encounter, Joseph explains to Aseneth that a pious (θεοσεβὴς) man should not kiss or embrace a foreign woman, and a pious woman will refrain from doing the same, thus implying the heroine's moral worthiness.

[265] Her., *H. P.*, 72.6.

[266] Her., *H. P.*, 72.5.

rationalizing etymology from ἐκφαίνειν, 'to display', and ἐναργῶς, 'plainly', because the function of speech is indeed to clarify thought.[267]

Hermes' prerogative to partake of both the heavenly sphere and the underworld is again explained through the two kinds of discourse which the divine messenger presides to. Philosophers distinguished between an internal speech (*logos endiathetos*) and a speech which is overt, because it reports inner thoughts (*logos prophorikos*). As the master of both speeches, Hermes undertakes the role of messenger of the Olympian gods as well as of a guide of human souls to Hades. In the metaphor, Heraclitus explains, internal speech is concealed in the dark recesses of the mind, and therefore Hermes, its embodiment, is called 'chthonic' by Homer, whereas overt speech is imagined as located in an upper space, in heaven, and visible from afar. Ritual sacrifices to Hermes which Heraclitus mentions are appropriately the tongue of animals, which is offered because it represents the organ of speech, and the last libation of the evening, at bedtime, 'because sleep is the end of all speech'.[268] The time of libation remarks the liminality of Hermes' role, as a messenger operating between divine and human dimensions, heaven and earth and the netherworld, and ultimately mediating between inner thought and its open verbalization.

One of the objects which characterize Hermes' figure is the golden wand with the power to cast or take away sleep thus illustrating control on human consciousness. In the following chapter in fact Heraclitus explains that Hermes stands at Odysseus' side as the representation of rational thought that prevails over the hero's anger and distress before entering Circe's house.[269] The lines which Hermes addresses to Odysseus are interpreted by the commentator as Odysseus' speech to himself.[270] In this interpretation the plant called *moly*, which Hermes offers to the hero as the antidote to Circe's drugs, becomes the emblem of wisdom, and its name is interpreted as deriving from the adjective *monos*, because wisdom is deemed to come only to humans, or from the adverb *molis*, because it comes only to few and with difficulty.[271] The description of the plant itself is pregnant with underlying senses: its

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[267]Her., *H. P.*, 72.11.
[268]Her., *H. P.*, 72.19.
[269]Her., *H. P.*, 73.1-3.
[270]*Od.* 10. 281-282: 'Poor wretch, why walk the hills alone,/when you know nothing of the country?'
[271]Her., *H. P.*, 73.10.

black root stands for a steep and difficult beginning, while its 'milk-white flower' signifies the sweet, worthy outcome if one commits himself bravely to the initial labor.[272] The sweet milky flower might also represent, between the lines of the commentary, the interpretive work of exegesis, as if the commentator wanted to say that the exegetical practice is hard in comparison to literal readings, but its results are fruitful and benefit epistemological activity. The black and white of the plant may also stand for the art of scripture, in which words occupy the blank space of writing material, like verbal sounds break the fluidity of silence. Hermes, the winged messenger and divine envoy, represents Odysseus' subtle persuasiveness, which is recognized by the nymph Calypso. Therefore, Hermes is interpreted by Heraclitus as the antonomasia of rational thought, wisdom and persuasiveness, as an allegorical figure illustrating the essential human faculties of reason and articulated speech.

> … Calypso gives the name Hermes to the persuasiveness of Odysseus' subtle words, when he succeeds, though with difficulty, in cajoling the loving nymph into letting him go on his way to Ithaca. This is why Hermes has come from Olympus in the likeness of a bird; for words are 'winged' in Homer (πτερόεντα… τὰ ἔπη), and nothing in human life flies swifter than a word.[273]

From the Genesis account Joseph is portrayed as an extraordinary youth and a shrewd administrator in the land of Egypt, able to use speech to conceal his identity and to devise a moral trial for his brothers. In his Life of Joseph, Philo brings Joseph's rhetorical skills to the extreme, making his hero the ideal politician, a universal model. In this respect, Joseph can be read as the earthly counterpart of divine wisdom translated into human words and therefore analogous to Hermes according to Heraclitus' Homeric treatise. The man from heaven in *J & A* can be read as an allegorical figure, analogous to Hermes in the interpretation of the *Homeric Problems*. The divine envoy is described as 'similar to Joseph in everything, the garment, the crown and the royal staff'[274]; with this information the novel may signify a religious-theological concept that is, the angelic messenger is Joseph's double in the transcendent dimension, as Israel represents the divine counterpart of Jacob and the mystical City of Refuge will be Aseneth's spiritual life

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[272]Her., *H. P.*, 73.12: '... sweet then in the light is the harvest of benefits'. Note the synaesthesia which signifies the clarity of reason and knowledge.
[273]Her., *H. P.*, 67.5-7, trans. Russell-Konstan (2005) slightly modified.
[274]*J & A*, 14.9.

in the eschatological time. Like Hermes, the emissary of God is an intermediary figure between divine and human sphere. His announcement conveys the true word of God and sanctions Aseneth's change of heart and identity. The motif of the words which are spoken is reiterated in the annunciation scene, as if repetition of the idea of speech could underline the important literary feature of direct discourse in *J & A*. Sacred words are dictated by the will of God which is absolute reason, the Logos. The miracle which the man from heaven performs with the honeycomb and its uncommon bees confirms the significance of the announcement in vivid images.

The descriptions of the heavenly honeycomb and the supernatural bees that inhabit it complement the theoretical passages of the scene, following the typical structure which is reiterated in *J & A*. The bees may illustrate concepts such as the human soul, priests of the Jewish Temple or other Jewish-Christian ministers/believers. Like the immeasurable produce of the land which Joseph gathers in the time of plenty, the bees that swarm out of the honeycomb are 'myriads and thousands' (i), possibly signifying the influential spreading of the word of God. The messenger's word effects the movement of the bees, which cover Aseneth's body entirely and start building another honeycomb on her lips; in versions of the novel, like Fink's revised edition which is quoted in the present work, part of the bees attempt to hurt Aseneth with their stings, but they fall to the ground dead. As the second quotation (ii) reports, the angel revives them by means of his vocal command and his wand, an instrument which is analogous to Hermes' magic rod. The messenger from heaven concludes the illustrative miracle with the rhetorical figure of synaesthesia in the question to Aseneth: has she *seen* that word (iii)?[275] Aseneth has understood, and the confirmation of the sacred truth is accomplished in the narrative framework of the annunciation.

i) And bees arose from the cells of that honeycomb and the cells were countless, myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.[276]

ii) And the man said to the bees: 'Go back to your place then'. And all the bees arose and swarmed and went up to the sky. And those which wanted to harm Aseneth fell to the ground and died. And the man stretched his

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[275]The rhetorical figure of synaesthesia combines words denoting two or more senses, for instance the perception of words as symbols to be seen.

[276]*J & A*, 16.17y: καὶ ἀνέστησαν μέλισσαι ἐκ τῶν σίμβλων τοῦ κηρίου ἐκείνου καὶ οἱ σίμβλοι ἦσαν ἀναρίθμητοι μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ χιλιάδες χιλιάδων

wand towards the dead bees and said to them: 'Get up you too and go back to your place'.[277]

iii) And the man said to Aseneth: 'Have you seen this word?' And she said: 'I have seen, my Lord.' And the man replied to her: 'These will be all my words, which I have spoken to you today'.[278]

By way of a preliminary conclusion, we can notice that points of contact can be detected between a treatise of Homeric criticism and an apparently plain Jewish narrative such as *J & A*. Indeed, both Heraclitus the grammarian and the anonymous author(s) of the novel start from the reference texts, respectively Homer and the Bible, to construct a new literary work significant in their cultural context. The present analysis shows that in the Hellenistic time educated authors added allegorical values to foundation texts. Thus, in pagan contexts Homeric passages were decoded as sources of mystical-philosophical knowledge, while Jewish intellectuals could construct a religious-mystical dimension in fiction drawing on biblical episodes. These authoritative texts in Hellenistic and Jewish cultures were deemed to imply profound senses in illustrative mode. Interpretative guidelines are explicitly added by Heraclitus to the Homeric text, whereas the significance of *J & A* in the context of Hellenistic Judaism is embedded in its scenes. The profound sense of the novel remains encoded in its narrative flow so that the reader is left with the task to disclose it. This allegorical strategy, which seems to undercut the complex significance of *J & A*, allowed subsequent readers to apply further assumptions on the text in different environments, such as the Late Antique Christian Churches of the East.

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[277] *J & A*, 16.20-22: καὶ εἶπεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ταῖς μελίσσαις· »ὑπάγετε δὴ εἰς τὸν τόπον ὑμῶν«. καὶ ἀνέστησαν πᾶσαι αἱ μέλισσαι καὶ ἐπετάσθησαν καὶ ἀπῆλθον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν. καὶ ὅσαι ἠβουλήθησαν ἀδικῆσαι τὴν Ἀσενὲθ ἔπεσον ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ ἀπέθανον. καὶ ἐξέτεινεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὴν ῥάβδον αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὰς μελίσσας τὰς νεκρὰς καὶ εἶπεν αὐταῖς· »ἀνάστητε καὶ ὑμεῖς καὶ ἀπέλθετε εἰς τὸν τόπον ὑμῶν«.

[278] *J & A*, 17.1-2: Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῇ Ἀσενὲθ· »ἑώρακας τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο; καὶ αὐτῇ εἶπεν· » ἑώρακα, κύριε μου. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος· »οὗτος ἔσται πάντα τὰ ῥήματά μου, ἃ λελάληκα πρός σε σήμερον.«

Chapter 2. Texts and Literary Contexts for *J & A.*

2.1 Introduction

The novel of Joseph and Aseneth (*J & A*) has travelled across the ages and geographical areas. Its conventional title indicates an ancient narrative that was originally composed in Greek and focussed on a biblical subject-matter that is, the marriage of the Hebrew patriarch Joseph to Aseneth, the daughter of the Egyptian priest of Heliopolis. As a text conceived in the form of a Greek novel while dealing with a Jewish religious topic, *J & A* has mostly been treated as a literary testimony originating in the Greek-speaking Judaism of the dispersion. In this interpretation, *J & A* is originally witness to the Jewish heritage that arose in a flourishing community of Hellenised Jews. However, the textual evidence of *J & A* consists of several late-antique and medieval manuscripts, which were copied in variant forms, translated and handed down in Christian environments. It is feasible that more ancient Jewish traditions about Aseneth were reinterpreted and re-written as a Christian story. Thus, a Hellenistic-Jewish novel about Joseph and his Egyptian wife potentially circulated in the broad span of time from the second century B.C. to the first/early-second

century A.D.[1] These dates correspond to the translation of the Hebrew holy books into Greek and its religious-literary use by the Jews.

Indeed, *J & A* might be a sacred account parallel to the Septuagint and prompted by the translation process itself, which was meant to expand the concise episodes of the biblical Joseph story in *Genesis* 37-50.[2] The novel's Egyptian setting and colouring speak in favour of its Hellenistic-Jewish origins. However Egypt, like the land of Israel, assumed a symbolic and universalistic value in both Jewish and Christian worldviews of subsequent centuries. Moreover, the story of the Greek Bible itself attests to the complex boundaries between Judaism and early-Christianity. In fact, although the Hellenistic Bible was first composed in the Hellenised Jewish environment of Ptolemaic Alexandria, this version was gradually abandoned by Jews and inherited in the nascent Christian Church. The name of Septuagint itself, which is used to indicate the Bible in Greek, was invented by Christians, on the basis of the legendary translators' number.[3] From the early second century A.D. other Jewish versions of the holy books in Greek were composed, with the aim of rendering a most reliable sacred text.[4]

On the other hand, books which were originally composed by Jews in Greek were afterwards abandoned by them and restored by Christians in the early canons of Scripture. The novel of *J & A* can be considered as a particular form of Jewish novella, a historical tale celebrating a less known biblical character, Aseneth, as well as Joseph's royalty in Egypt.[5] Indeed, *J & A* is an independent narrative, only related to the Septuagint for its quotations and vocabulary. However, the textual tradition of

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[1] For a careful consideration of dates, see e.g. Burchard (1985) 187: 'A book glorifying the mother of the proselytes ought to have been written before Greek-speaking Judaism ceased to make its impact on the ancient world and gave way to Christianity. On the other hand, Joseph and Aseneth presupposes at least some of the Septuagint, and probably all of it. It is hard to decode this into dates, but we are probably safe to say that the book was written between 100 B.C. and Hadrian's edict against circumcision, which has to do with the Second Jewish War of A.D. 132-135. If Joseph and Aseneth comes from Egypt, the Jewish revolt under Trajan (c. A.D. 115-117) is the latest possible date.'

[2] See Chapter 1, pp. 39-49.

[3] See e. g. Hengel (2002) 59-60: the Septuagint is a collection of writings claimed by Christians; the three great codices of Scripture in Greek, Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus, belong in the fourth-fifth centuries A.D.

[4] These are the translations of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion. A few scholars nowadays use the diction Old Greek (OG) to indicate the early, Hellenistic Septuagint; see e.g. Kraemer (1998) and Ahearne-Kroll (2005).

[5] Pervo (1991).

the novel might have followed the pattern of the Septuagint, if *J & A* originated in a Hellenistic-Jewish cultural milieu, and was subsequently well received, with further adaptations/interpretations in later Jewish and Christian environments. The present chapter posits a poly-cultural[6] background for *J & A* both synchronically, at the hypothetical time of its early composition, and diachronically that is, during the novel's reception throughout the ages. In fact, I aim to focus on the interplay between narrative and religious sensibilities in feasible literary backgrounds for the origins, reception and adaptation of *J & A*. I shall explore a range of texts that belonged in Hellenistic pagan mysticism, treatises from the *Corpus Hermeticum* and alchemical-philosophical texts, in order to discuss the complex religious design underlying *J & A*, which is conveyed through rhetorical strategies such as the revelation of the truth to human beings from the superior divine sphere. I shall next consider mystical elements which are scattered in fragmentary Jewish narratives such as the *Prayer of Joseph* and the *History of Joseph*, comparing them to the novel as well as to Origen's exegesis and commentary on the *Song of Songs*. In addition, the Gnostic mythical account known as *Apocryphon of John* is useful to propose further readings for the symbolic imagery of *J & A*. As a text at the crossroads of Hellenism, Judaism and early Christianity, *J & A* can be compared with the *Tabula Cebetis*, an eclectic philosophical-allegorical treatise of uncertain date which represents graphically the pattern of human life as well as ethical concepts. I have chosen these texts with the hope to provide a fruitful terrain for a better understanding of the imagery and concepts of *J & A* in relation to Hellenistic religious sensibilities and the Jewish-Christian allegorical interpretation of Scripture.

If the origins of *J & A* go back to Ptolemaic or Graeco-Roman Egypt, as scholars have tended to argue, its text was handed down, with significant variations, from its most ancient cultural background to subsequent environments, such as late-antique Syria and the Christian Churches of the East, as the textual evidence shows.

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[6] In the present chapter I choose the definition of polycultural rather than multicultural, following Fredrik Barth's coinage of a 'poly-ethnic environment' and the use which Patricia Ahearne-Kroll has made of it in her PhD dissertation. In fact, I assume the term 'polycultural' as indicating the 'co-presence' of cultural groups in mutual relation and interacting within flexible boundaries; this definition of a shared or communal cultural background seems to me more accurate than the term 'multicultural', which is more vague and renders an obvious, widespread situation in antiquity. See Barth (1970) 9-38 and Ahearne-Kroll (2005).

The process of starting from the witnesses of the textual tradition in order to rediscover the original literary work in its historical-cultural milieu has been a consistent approach in scholarship of *J & A*. This methodology has been codified in most recent studies of *J & A* and the Jewish narratives which have been included in the corpus of the pseudepigrapha.[7] Works of uncertain provenance because of testimonies loss and the complex religious environments which saw their origins, the pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament represent parallel traditions of the holy books.[8] These literary works may expand the biblical text, re-elaborating or creating new stories related to Scripture, without necessarily bearing the name of a renowned personage as their alleged author.[9] Within this literary-religious collection, *J & A* represents a unique example of a text at the borderline of ancient literary genres. As an ancient Jewish novel, it starts from the relevant biblical verses about Joseph's marriage to Aseneth, daughter of the priest of Heliopolis; in the second part of its twofold plot, the narrative retells the birth of Ephraim and Manasseh, still following the biblical account,[10] while either inventing or developing commonplaces of the ancient novel. In Classical scholarship the leading trend has been to assume that the anonymous author of *J & A* played on motifs which are exemplified in the extant Greek erotic novels as well as in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.[11] Conversely, the text

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[7] See especially Davila (2006) and the review by Inowlocki (2006).

[8] The definition of Old Testament is here used as a convenient label to indicate the Jewish holy books, which were written before the first testimonies of the Christian Church and independently from later Christian interpretations. The first occurrence of the term 'Testament' appears in the second century A.D., when Melito of Sardis (c.170 A.D.) sent a fellow Christian, Onesimus, 'excerpts from the law and the prophets', and a list of the 'books of the Old Covenant', τὰ τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης βιβλία: Hengel (2002) 60-61. As Chapman has remarked, if the term 'Old Testament is foreign to pre-Christian Judaism', similarly 'Hebrew Bible' does not do better justice for ancient Israel; therefore, in the present work the term 'Old Testament' will be used, following this line, 'not to impose a network of Christian theological presuppositions upon this literature, but rather positively to describe the status of Israel's Scripture as a venerable collection for both Early Judaism and Early Christianity': Chapman (2003) 29, n. 1.

[9] In fact, the sense which is attributed to the Jewish and Christian pseudepigrapha may be different from the significance of ancient/classical pseudepigraphy that is, the literary choice to use an important name, e. g. Plato, on anonymous authors' part, in order to add authority to their works.

[10] *Genesis (LXX)*, 41.45-47: first reference to Aseneth, daughter of Petephres-*incipit* of the novel, *J & A*, 1.1-2; cf. 3.1. *Genesis (LXX)*, 41.50: second reference to Aseneth, and birth of Ephraim & Manasseh in *Genesis*- *J & A*, 21.9: end of the first part of the novel.

[11] E.g. Burchard (1974), Kee (1983).

can be evaluated as a testimony of Jewish identity in Ptolemaic Egypt, so that *J & A* becomes the first novel in the literature of Greece and the Near East.[12]

I start this literary analysis taking into consideration one of the textual issues of *J & A* in section 2.2.1. It is noteworthy that attempts to pin down the earliest phases of *J & A* in its literary-historical background(s) have been linked to the issue of its textual tradition. In fact, although the extant manuscripts (MSS) present a consistent story-line, the various texts may differ in length, for the presence or omission of passages that is prayers, detailed descriptions and narrative scenes. This variation, noticeable at first glance from the macro-structure of *J & A*, has been interpreted by scholars as the marker of successive re-elaborations on later scribes' part. Philological results led to the reconstruction of two versions of *J & A*, the former more concise, the latter containing more extensive digressions, which seems additional rhetorical devices. Accordingly, the so-called short and long texts of *J & A* have been used as convenient working-models in both textual criticism and literary-historical studies of the novel. Thus on the one hand, philological investigation on the MSS has allowed scholars to detect relations between the textual witnesses of *J & A*, in the attempt to discover which texts and versions represent the best form of the novel, or the one which is closer to its hypothetical original. On the other hand, literary-cultural studies of *J & A* have to rely on the available critical editions of the text, although interesting considerations have been suggested on the basis of the short/long redactions of the novel.

In this connection, a textual problem has prompted my suggestion that the tradition of *J & A* can be compared to allegorical-salvationist texts. Indeed, the variant readings ἄνθρωπος/ἄγγελος designating the divine envoy in the announcement scene to Aseneth may indicate a change in the conception of the messenger figure in different literary-religious environments. The themes emerging in the announcement scene of the novel, which assimilate it to allegorical-doctrinal texts, are the presence and role of heavenly envoys and men of God, figures of light

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[12]See Bohak (1993); (1996) for the suggestion that *J & A* was composed in Ptolemaic Egypt under the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor; the key for this interpretation is the messenger-scene in the novel, with the prodigious wonder of the bees and honeycomb; Braginskaya (2005-2007) goes further analysing *J & A* as an early-Jewish narrative that is related to the biblical source and potentially a proto-novel.

bearing angelic traits, the motifs of 'light' (φῶς), 'life' (ζωή), as well as a possible hint at the philosophical concepts of παλιγγένεσις or 'rebirth' and at νοῦς, divine reason informing both the human soul and the whole creation. A survey of these themes in *J & A* and in pagan, Jewish and early Christian texts aims to point out the plurality of senses which can be discerned in the novel. The underlying complexity of *J & A* might come from its original Hellenistic polycultural background, which produced a poly-semantic love story. It is also feasible that further senses were added to the novelistic plot of *J & A* with the insertion of more extensive lyric passages that is, its hymns, odes and prayers. Although only accurate philological investigation can provide a firmer ground to establish relations between textual witnesses, the extant tradition of *J & A* attests its rich reception throughout the ages. While the novel continued to be a lively text in various Christian environments, its significance changed according to the needs of subsequent audiences. Therefore, the same novel went through literary-historical phases, and its texts were adapted for different purposes by copyists who reworked *J & A* as new authors.

The variation ἄνθρωπος-ἄγγελος in the tradition of *J & A* is thus assumed as the starting point to explore the messenger's nature and role in the narrative and its ancient contexts. Supernatural figures are designated with the same words in salvationist passages from the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The *Corpus Hermeticum* is a collection of eclectic texts belonging in various ages, from the third century B.C. to Late Antiquity. The title comes from the mysterious figure of Hermes Trismegistos, a deity of wisdom and knowledge, and the Hellenic counterpart of the Egyptian Thoth. The authors of treatises and excerpts contained in the *CH* claim to derive their knowledge from the most ancient lore of Egypt and the Near East. In much the same way Zosimus of Panopolis, a third-fourth century A.D. scientist devoted to alchemy, the precursor of modern chemistry and physics, combines Egyptian myth and Hebrew mysticism. Moreover, Zosimus describes an archetypal Man, forefather of humankind, who assumes the emblematic name of Adam, which is composed by four letters like the four components of matter. In the analysis of section 2.2.1 I suggest that the 'man from heaven' of *J & A* represented, at least in part of the tradition and reception of the novel, an archetypal human being, analogous to the figures of Ἄνθρωπος and Φώς in extracts from the *CH* and in mystical-alchemical texts. In

the novel, the definition of Joseph as a 'son of God' may be pregnant with a mystical valence that combines Hebrew lore, the biblical tradition and pagan beliefs. In fact, Zosimus of Panopolis indicates with the figure of a 'son of God' a supernatural being endowed with the prerogative to assume divine, angelic and human natures; because of this privileged relationship with all natures and spiritual entities, the 'son of God' can enlighten the human soul, lifting it up to a superior sphere. Like previous allegorical authors, Zosimus employs Hellenic philosophical language to explain mystical-religious concepts common to pagan, Jewish and early-Christian cultures.

As it will appear in the following section 2.2.2, passages from the *CH* highlight a conception of human beings as recipients of mystical significance and the divine prerogative that allows Hermes and his son-disciple Tat to pass through the various natures of being. Possible analogies between the novel of *J & A*, the *CH* and alchemic-philosophical texts may testify to the blending of Hebrew tradition and the Hellenic contemporary knowledge disguised as Egyptian lore, with reference to a remote wisdom that transcends boundaries of time, space and civilizations. In addition the motifs of spirit (πνεῦμα) and light (φῶς) in *J & A* can be considered as images illustrating the concept of a 'change of heart' in terms of a mystical transformation that recalls the divine creative process in primordial times. In support of the multiple literary-religious contexts which may have inspired the composition and adaptations of *J & A*, we can find analogous significant imagery in the alchemical-philosophical treatise ascribed to Cleopatra the alchemist. In fact, the transformation process from a dark, raw metal into shining gold can be read according to a deeper sense as the allegory for the mystical passage of the soul from the darkness of ignorance and error to the light of knowledge and salvation, which corresponds to the allegorical imagery recurring in *J & A*. In fact, the description of Aseneth's transformation in a spiritual creature and her mystical passage from darkness to light are consistent with the vocabulary of divine creation in the novel. With the purpose of remarking the influence which a text such as *J & A* might have had in early Christianity, I shall consider the case of Origen's *Commentary on John* and his learned exegesis of the aforementioned concepts according to the different senses of Scripture.

Thus, *J & A* can be understood as a text that crossed boundaries of time and literary-religious systems. As I argue in section 2.2.3, the novel can be counted among the Jewish narratives while it can be defined as a variant example of *aggada*, the historical tradition of Israel. A Jewish pseudepigraphon preserved with the title *Prayer of Joseph* is extant in fragments that portray the patriarch Jacob-Israel recounting his wrestle with an angel of God. The fragmentary narrative adds to the biblical source of Genesis 32 details such as the disclosure of the angel's name of Urièl and his place in the heavenly rank; in addition, Jacob's change of name into Israel denotes the patriarch's new angelic nature. These passages are in tune with the outlook of Jewish writers throughout the Hellenistic-Late Antique period, when Judaism found ways of expression in mystical-magical terms.[13] As was the case for the anonymous Christian reception of *J & A*, the *Prayer of Joseph* was also handed down by Christians, as a Hebrew testimony which Origen quoted to support his arguments in the commentaries on John and on Genesis. In the novel of *J & A*, Joseph is presented as the 'powerful one of God', while having an angelic double in the man from heaven. Both the divine envoy and Joseph are in fact introduced as God's messengers, intermediaries of joyful tidings about life and truth. The patriarch Jacob in the novel is also represented as a divine man, being at the same time Jacob the Jewish forefather and Israel, the embodiment of God's elected people.

The survey in section 2.3 shows that the formulaic expression εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον recurs in the most important passages of *J & A*, illustrating an indefinite amalgam of time and space which connotes the divine sphere. The eternal-superior dimension defines God's creation and the realm of the good souls, where they can dwell forever. The recurring expression is significant for the interpretation of the novel in its religious-cultural contexts. In fact, the formula εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον

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[13] See Swartz (2006) for an interesting informative survey of Jewish magic in rabbinic culture. Swartz points out that magic was part of an eclectic knowledge which linked various cultures in the Mediterranean basin from the archaic period to Hellenism and Late Antiquity. The Jews acquired renown for their rituals, beneficial practices and ability to read omens through signs inscribed in nature or in functional objects. Biblical heroes such as Moses and the king Solomon were celebrated in various cultures as model magicians and wise men. Magical practices described for instance in the Greek Magical Papyri include incantations, recipes, prayers. Jewish magical texts usually contain three main themes: 'the adjuration of intermediaries, such as angels or daemons; the use of powerful names of God as the source of the magician's authority; the use of these techniques for the personal needs of the individual.' I quote from Swartz (2006) 702.

connotes the sacred marriage of Joseph and Aseneth, which is envisioned in the dimension of αἰών. Interestingly the time-indicator σήμερον, literally 'today', also signifies a dimension that transcends earthly chronological boundaries, designating a momentous time. The terms σήμερον and αἰών are explained by the Jewish intellectual Philo of Alexandria as metaphysical concepts that are contained in Scripture, representing ethical teachings to the readers as exegetes. The terms/concepts recur in the Septuagint, rendering in formulaic mode the Hebrew tenets of life-entirety of time and eternity. With its reiterated use of the expressions *J & A* attests its relation to the Septuagint as well as its significance in the original context of Hellenistic Judaism. In addition, the use of the 'terms for eternity' in *J & A* confirms that like the Septuagint was inherited by Christian readers and exegetes, new senses were added to the biblical love-story of Aseneth in several Christian contexts.

The language and imagery of the fourth Gospel, its symbols of the Logos and the light, have been compared with the religious similes of *J & A*.[14] Indeed the novel can offer important material for the interpretation of the New Testament and the cultural climate of early Christianity, as scholars have recognised. The *Apocryphon of John*, a non-canonical text with elements of a biblical account and of revelation, contains plenty of fiction and allegorical imagery, like *J & A* itself. By comparing aspects of the two religious narratives in section 2.4 I point out parallels in the literary construction of spiritual realms and the evocation of a remote mythical dimension, outside historical time and physical space. It is worth noting, however, that the afterlife of the *Apocryphon* was different from the rich reception of *J & A*. As a religious literary work conveying a Gnostic doctrine, John's secret revelation was perceived as a matter of controversy in the fifth century and therefore hidden in a pot by Pachomian monks, then preserved by the soil of Egypt until the rediscovery of the Nag Hammadi texts in 1945.

Although *J & A* was restored from scholarly oblivion relatively late, with Henri Batiffol's *editio princeps*[15] of the 'long' manuscript A in 1889 and Aptowitzer's

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[14] E. g. Burchard (1987).
[15] Batiffol (1889-1890). A= 111 Rome, *Vaticanus Graecus* 803, f. 133r-147v, eleventh-twelfth centuries.

literary interpretation of *Aseneth* as the re-elaboration of a Jewish aggadic legend in 1924, the extant tradition of the novel was accepted favourably in environments of mainstream Christianity. Thus, should *J & A* contain elements of Gnosticism, these are embedded in the narrative and its enigmatic imagery, and concealed under the veil of allegory. In order to exemplify the use of allegory and figurative language in philosophical-religious contexts, in the same section I shall consider the symbolic representation of human life according to the *Tabula Cebetis*. This description of a votive engraving in a sacred space contains references to various mythical and philosophical traditions; like *J & A*, the *Tablet* was well received and its significance re-interpreted. Indeed, the content of *J & A* was understood as sacred in various religious-cultural environments, perhaps from the Jewish communities of Hellenistic cities to the early Christian Churches, up to monastic and educated circles in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the early Modern Era. It is feasible that the plurality of senses in *J & A*, while making it a versatile text, enhanced its preservation and later reception.

I shall conclude the present survey of allegorical texts at section 2.5 with a concise comparison between *J & A* and Origen's commentary on *The Song of Songs*.[16] Both the novel and the *Song of Songs* contain lyric imagery, such as metaphors to define a divine bride and a symbolic landscape. Ross Shepard Kraemer argued that the longer version of *J & A* contains additions that borrow significant images from the prophetic books and the canticle of Solomon. These images add allegorical senses to the novel: the figure of Aseneth may be constructed on the model of the Daughter of Zion in the book of Isaiah as well as the Daughter Jerusalem in Ezechiel,[17] often unfaithful but eventually forgiven by God on account of the sacred covenant established with Him. In my literary analysis of Origen's allegorical commentary and *J & A*, I aim to go one step further Kraemer's stance,

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[16] In the present work I make use of the Italian edition of Origen's commentary preserved in the Greek fragments by Barbàra (2005). The original ten books of the commentary went through a reception shipwreck, while the Latin version by Rufinus reduces the work to two books without rendering the philological comparisons between the Greek Jewish versions of the LXX texts that is, Aquila, Theodotion and Symmachus; as Edwards has remarked, in the three-hundred years between the composition of the commentary in 240 A.D. and the questioning of Origen's orthodoxy, the Church Father was influential over Gregory Nyssen, Ambrose, Augustine, Theodoret, Nylus. See the book review by Edwards (2007).

[17] See Isaiah, 13-26; Ezechiel, 16.3-30; Kraemer (1998) 27-30.

hopefully adding a tiny piece to the complex mosaic of studies of *J & A*. Indeed, if the novel was composed by a learned author drawing on various allegorical passages of the biblical inter-text in order to compose an original allegorical narrative, its significance can be better understood with parallel readings from the verses of Isaiah, Ezechiel and the *Song of Songs*. However, what happened to the tradition of *J & A* when subsequent authors seemed to add significant details to its scenes, like a commentary embedded in narrative? Should the significance of the originally Jewish-Hellenistic text have changed in subsequent early Christian environments, the place of *J & A* in ancient culture can be better understood taking into account the Christian interpretation which Origen developed for the originally Hebrew and lately Jewish Hellenistic *Song of Songs*. Indeed, although it is possible to argue that the hypothetical original novel of *J & A* was Jewish and did not contain any reference to Christian notions, it is undeniable that the novel tradition was well received throughout centuries of Christianity and therefore understood as a Christian story.

2.2 *J & A* among Mystical Texts or, Looking for the Significance of a Poly-cultural Novel.

If in the antiquity of archaic and classical Greece religion was not disjoined from literature, drama, rhetoric and public declamation, [18] Jewish literature of the Hellenistic period testifies to the appropriation and reinterpretation of Graeco-Roman genres and rhetorical devices to convey Hebrew lore and principles of biblical exegesis in narrative mode. In the Jewish novel of *J & A* the characterization of the heroes, Joseph, Jacob-Israel and Levi, and of the divine envoy descending from heaven to announce God's plan to Aseneth, can be compared to epic scenes of encounters between mortals and divine messengers, [19] as well as to biblical announcement-scenes. Indeed, the descriptions of Joseph and the messenger from heaven, as well as the speeches they pronounce, convey theoretical points expressed in figurative language. For instance, the concepts of spiritual salvation, acquisition of the truth and eternal life are rendered through the metaphorical image of the passage

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[18] For this acute consideration, see Scarpi's review of Montiglio (2002).
[19] See e.g. the allegorical readings of Athena's intervention in the Homeric poems by Heraclitus the Allegorist in Chapter 1, pp. 80-101.

from darkness to light, from error to truth and from death to life.[20] The threefold passage from a negative condition to its opposite stands for a radical conversion. Likewise, the triad of bread, cup and ointment is introduced by Joseph as an ambivalent means of nourishment and healing for the elected rather than of corruption and deceit for the outsiders, worshipers of idols.[21] The three positive elements are eventually identified with the heavenly honeycomb in the explanation of the divine messenger.[22] Although interesting parallels to these images can be highlighted in classical literature from archaic poetry to Homeric allegorical exegesis in Late Antiquity, as well as in the erudite Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, the significance of the elements in the novel remains obscure. In addition, texts that were handed down across the centuries such as those composing the tradition of *J & A* were read in various interpretations.

2.2.1 Divine Envoys and Men of God: is *J & A* Enigmatic like the *Corpus Hermeticum*?

The hallowed and secret revelation of the truth, the knowledge of divine mysteries and the conversion of the soul, all themes at the core of *J & A*, recur in the treatises of the composite *Corpus Hermeticum*. These texts were presented as the cultural heritage of ancient Egypt, while conveying Hellenistic and Late Antique religious content and bearing points of contact with Jewish-Christian doctrine. According to the Hermetic tradition Hermes Trismegistos, the Hellenic counterpart of the Egyptian Thoth, passed down his wisdom to his son Tat, embodiment of humanity. In the complex cultural milieu of Hellenism and Late Antiquity, 'the three times great Hermes' may be interpreted as 'God the Most High', the God named in *J & A* as well as in pagan late antique contexts. The relationship between the highest deity and his divine son, as it is represented in the Hermetic tracts, is illustrative of the concept of religion as a knowledge that can be taught. In the first Greek treatise of the collection a supernatural being, Poimandres, reveals to a seer-narrator the mysterious truths of

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[20] *J & A*, 8.9: Joseph's prayer of blessing for Aseneth.
[21] *J & A*, 8.5: Joseph's rhetorical speech to refuse Aseneth's embrace and kiss.
[22] *J & A*, 16.16: the divine envoy assures that by eating a piece of the honeycomb Aseneth has had the bread of life, the cup of immortality and the ointment of incorruptibility.

nature and the cosmos. Like in *J & A*, life is associated with light, whereas darkness equates the amorphous matter and a negative moral condition. Poimandres declares to be the embodiment of superior reason, the 'νοῦς of absolute sovereignty';[23] the divine being bears a pregnant name that signifies literally 'shepherd-man' or 'shepherd of men', a figure assuming symbolic value in early Judaism and Christianity. In much the same way *C.H. XIII* is a significant example of mystical discourse, being devised in the literary framework of a dialogue between Hermes and Tat; while Tat witnesses to prodigious events in ecstatic condition and is instructed by Hermes' hallowed discourse, he gradually realises that the god is transcending his nature, partaking of different forms of life and therefore animating the universe. The core theme of treatise XIII is in fact 'rebirth' or 'regeneration'.[24] Rebirth described as mystical transformation is also the process which Aseneth undergoes after her encounter with the divine envoy; indeed, she is portrayed as a figure of light maintaining human features on earth, whereas her future as a 'City of Refuge' in the eschatological dimension is prefigured as an eternal condition that guarantees spiritual rescue for humankind.

Before turning to a more detailed literary analysis of the texts, it is useful to highlight the points of contact between Hermetic themes and *J & A*. These themes are the presence of a supernatural being which conveys a mystical revelation to the seer-disciple, the exhortation to human beings to make a courageous choice, preferring the path of virtue and knowledge and rejecting ignorance-indifference, the metaphor of a mystical transformation to indicate the passage from an obscure negative dimension to the realm of the light. The first theme, the presence of a divine being, in *J & A* is related to a textual problem and has been considered in the philological discussion of the novel. Indeed, variant readings in the texts may indicate different phases in the tradition(s) of *J & A*. From the collation of the manuscripts available at his time, Philonenko identified a short text, in his opinion more ancient and closer to the original, and three subsequent long versions, apparently conveying additional material. According to Philonenko later scribes, working as authors on the text of *J & A*, substituted for the uncommon image of a

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[23] *C.H.I.*1; the treatise is also known as *Poimandres.*
[24] Festugière (2006) 211-220.

man descending from heaven the more familiar notion of an angel. Indeed, the name that qualifies the divine envoy varies in the texts, being 'a man' (ἄνθρωπος), in manuscripts that constitute the short version of *J & A*, while witnesses of the long text, such as MS A, report the reading ἄγγελος or θεῖος ἄγγελος. In Philonenko's argument, the novel became a popular story similar to a hagiographical tradition. When *J & A* was so well received in Christian environments and understood by different audiences, the term ἄγγελος was preferred to convey an immediately significant concept in the collective imagery of readers or hearers of late-antique and medieval Christian environments.[25] However, emissaries of God in the Septuagint are often designated with the appellative of ἄνθρωπος, which was loaded with a deeper, religious sense.[26] In addition the term ἄνθρωπος, pregnant with theoretical significance, might have equally replaced the reading ἄγγελος in secondary texts that is, in later copies of the novel such as witnesses to its short version.

In the imagery of the novel the association between the 'man from heaven' and the morning star, herald of dawn that announces simultaneously the divine being's arrival, recalls further metaphors. The scene of the encounter between the heroine and the divine envoy is modelled on episodes of the Old Testament and the Gospels, in which heavenly emissaries announce to virtuous women that through them is sealed the covenant between God and His people.[27] The following passage from *J & A* describes the rise of the morning star in the East and the epiphany of the man from heaven, as soon as Aseneth has finished her confession to God. Aseneth's speech hints at an underlying sense of the event: when the morning star opens the way to dawn from the East, it is also defined as a 'messenger and herald' (ἄγγελος καὶ κήρυξ) of the light (φωτὸς) of the Great Day that is, the first day of creation or Day

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[25]Note that the reading ἄνθρωπος to designate the messenger in *J & A* has been preferred in the latest revised editions of the Greek text, namely Burchard (2003) and Fink (2008); e.g. *J & A*, 14.3. Philonenko (1968) considered this reading as a mark of the original, most ancient text, whereas later scribes may have corrected it in ἄγγελος. Cf. the Latin version in MS 435: *descendens... angelus dei* (*domini*).

[26] See e.g. Genesis 32.24-30: Jacob has to wrestle with an emissary of God, who is called a ἄνθρωπος.

[27] See also the next section 2.3. The announcement scene of *J & A* is considered from the angle of epic-philosophical epiphanies in Chapter 3.

of Atonement, as the Greek expression (τῆς μεγάλης ἡμέρας) suggests.[28] The unbearable light that precedes the epiphany when the sky is torn apart announces the beginning of that special day, which is expected and foreseen in Aseneth's words.

> And as soon as Aseneth had finished her confession to the Lord the morning star which brings the dawn rose in the sky in the East and Aseneth saw it and rejoiced and said: 'Then the Lord God has listened to me, because this star is a messenger and herald of the light of the great day (ὁ ἀστὴρ οὗτος ἄγγελος καὶ κήρυξ ἐστὶ φωτὸς τῆς μεγάλης ἡμέρας)'. And suddenly besides the morning star the sky was torn apart and an ineffable light appeared (ἐφάνη φῶς ἀνεκλάλητον). And Aseneth fell on her face to the ground and came to her a man from heaven (ἦλθε πρὸς αὐτὴν ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ).[29]

The figure of the heavenly messenger can be compared to divine envoys in Greek mythology and the epic poems, which can be seen as 'allegories of representation' that is, for instaallegorizations of speech, its function and meaning in the narrative, as Andrew Laird has demonstrated.[30] The Jewish narrative of *J & A*, if its tradition originated in a Hellenistic background, contains allegorical imagery similar to the interpretive devices of contemporary pagan texts and therefore was understandable by pagan readers. Literary-conceptual parallels are in fact illustrative of the language and rhetorical figures that were shared by educated Jews and their pagan neighbours. By highlighting these points of contact, I am not arguing for a necessary dependence of *J & A* on Hellenistic literary genres, but just indicating the evidence for a possible common denominator.

Interestingly, the Greek genitive φωτὸς, rather than plainly meaning 'of the light', might refer to the divine being or to the realm of his provenance. In fact, in both pagan and Jewish-Christian mystical texts, the figure of Φώς designated the

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[28] See Burchard (1985) 224 n. c, with interesting parallels between *J & A*, the biblical text and Hellenistic narratives.

[29] *J & A*, 14.1-4: Καὶ ὡς ἐπαύσατο Ἀσενὲθ ἐξομολογουμένη τῷ κυρίῳ ἀνέτειλεν ὁ ἑωσφόρος ἀστὴρ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατὰ ἀνατολάς, καὶ εἶδεν αὐτὸν Ἀσενὲθ καὶ ἐχάρε καὶ εἶπεν· ἄρα ἐπήκουσέ μου κύριος ὁ θεός, διότι ὁ ἀστὴρ οὗτος ἄγγελος καὶ κήρυξ ἐστὶ φωτὸς τῆς μεγάλης ἡμέρας. Καὶ ἰδοὺ πλησίον τοῦ ἑωσφόρου ἐσχίσθη ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἐφάνη φῶς ἀνεκλάλητον. Καὶ ἔπεσεν Ἀσενὲθ ἐπὶ πρόσωπον ἐπὶ τὴν τέφραν καὶ ἦλθε πρὸς αὐτὴν ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

[30] Laird (1999).

archetypal human being, equivalent of Ἄνθρωπος.[31] If this sense of the term was embedded in the narrative, educated scribes at some stage of the textual tradition might have elaborated the image of a 'man from heaven', using the literary-poetic term φώς, 'man' to indicate an extraordinary being with human features, representative of an important theological notion. Although the ambiguity of the genitive φωτὸς, potentially referring both to the light and to the man, seems to be a too subtle play by wording, difficult to grasp for an audience of readers or hearers, the slightly convoluted structure of the passage may indicate the presence of an interpolation: ὁ ἀστὴρ οὗτος ἄγγελος καὶ κήρυξ ἐστὶ φωτὸς τῆς μεγάλης ἡμέρας. This conjecture seems to be confirmed in a witness that Philonenko linked to the short version of *J & A*, manuscript B[32], which reports in the next sentence ἄνθρωπος φωτὸς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. If φωτὸς was interpreted as the heavenly being, the term may be a learned correction/comment out of theological concern and therefore analogous to the variant reading ἄνθρωπος, of which φώς may constitute the erudite counterpart. The connection which is initially established between the star and the man from heaven may thus be confirmed in the underlying sense of the passage and by means of the ambiguity of φωτὸς, at the same time the 'light' and the 'man', if the concepts are ultimately identified. Indeed, if the morning star by means of its light (φῶς) is ἄγγελος καὶ κήρυξ, it corresponds to the divine messenger, equally in the texts that contain the reading ἄνθρωπος. [33]

The variation in the name to designate the messenger from heaven seems to indicate a change in the religious sense, which is concealed 'between the lines' of *J & A*. Rather than representing clues in the distinction between the two versions of the novel, the so-called short and long texts, as Philonenko surmised, the terms-concepts

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[31] For instance, in the Jewish tragedy by Ezechiel, the *Exagoge*, the divine figure who appears to Moses in a vision ia called a φώς. For the *Exagoge*, a tragedy on the theme of Exodus, see Robertson (1985) in Charlesworth (ed.) (1985) 803-819; the Greek text can be found in Snell (1971).

[32] B= 112, Rome, Biblioteca Vaticana, Palatinus Gr. 17, f. 118v-134v, eleventh century.

[33] In magical-mystical texts, such as the Greek magical papyri, angels are indeed stars assuming human features that visit the initiate to mysteries; see Inowlocki (2002) 119-120. The 'morning star' is also a Jewish symbol, which was inherited in early Christianity to indicate the Saviour; see e.g. John's *Revelation*, 22.16, where Jesus declares to be 'the bright and morning star', and cf. *Num.* 24.17 and *Ps.* 110.3.

ἄνθρωπος and ἄγγελος are likely to attest the variety of readings, thus interpretations, in the extant MSS of *J & A*. On the other hand, the consistency of the story-line in the manuscripts testifies to the transmission and reception of a unique literary work that is, one novel has been recounted in various texts throughout subsequent cultural milieux.[34] If we consider the religious-mystical writings of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, we shall observe that the literary-poetical word φώς recurs with the meaning of 'man' as a spiritual being. In the first treatise of the Corpus, the *Poimandres*, symbolic light is associated with life, knowledge and immortality in the spiritual realm, which is imagined in a higher world, whereas darkness equals the sphere of everything material. The significance of this imagery may provide a better explanation for the mystical language in *J & A*. Moreover, in the rhetorical exhortation to converts, towards the conclusion of the treatise, a genitive φωτὸς may signify, in the context of the passage, both 'light' and 'man', thus opening a semantic issue analogous to that of *J & A*.

A digression about the significance of the literary-poetical word φώς is here necessary. In mythical accounts inherited by the *Corpus Hermeticum* men were φῶτες by nature when they lived in Paradise before their coming into being on earth. Their mythical prototype, ὁ Φώς, is the embodiment of human essence in the realm of absolute, spiritual being.[35] The *Corpus Hermeticum* includes testimonies that belong in different ages, from the fourth century B.C. to Late Antiquity. In addition fragments from the works of Zosimus of Panopolis, author of alchemic and philosophical tracts, active in Egypt around 300 A.D., are significant for the images of the human prototype and the figure of a 'son of God', able to assume different natures. Parallels with the imagery and concepts of *J & A* seem to provide further suggestions to determine the novel's cultural environment of provenance and transmission. The following passage defines the nature of Φώς.

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[34]As it will be clarified in the following textual analysis, implicit theological notions can be detected in *J & A*, which were particularly significant in early-Christian environments, such as Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor until the third-fourth centuries A.D.

[35]See Scott (1936) vol. iv (Testimonia), 128-129, and cf. testimonies 6-7: ἀνήνεγκεν ὅπου καὶ τὸ πρότερον διῆγον φῶτες καλούμενοι.

> … the name of designation is called Man (Φώς), and consequently also the human race is called men (φῶτας) after him… when the Man was in Paradise, and life was breathed into him according to (his) destiny, they persuaded him, as he was guileless and inactive, to assume the nature of Adam among them, the one from the four letters/elements, but because of his innocence he was not swayed; yet they boasted that he had been enslaved (…)[36]

Adam and his mythical prototype, <ὁ> Φὼς, may have inspired the characterization of the man from heaven in the novel. As already noted, the enigmatic expression in one text of *J & A*, ἄνθρωπος φωτὸς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (MS B), rather than just reporting a scribal error of reduplication in copying the term φῶς-φωτὸς twice, might be the sign of an erudite reinterpretation of the messenger-scene in the novel. The man from heaven is an emissary of the transcendent realm of being, and possibly the visible emanation of the heavenly human archetype. The tone of the excerpt is similar to that of a foundation myth, which assimilates the account with the imagery of creation and transformation in *J & A*.

In much the same way the following passage from Zosimus depicts the divine being with attributes that recall motifs of *J & A* as well as other Jewish and early-Christian texts. It is noteworthy that a division is sketched between the material world and the superior realm. The earthly dimension is represented by the divine being undertaking corporeal natures, whereas the spiritual sphere is characterized by being immaterial (ἀσώματον), a happy place which is imagined in a higher position (εἰς τὸν εὐδαίμονα χῶρον ἀνώρμησεν), and ultimately identified with the light, as every human soul tends towards it (εἰς ἐκείνο τὸ φῶς), being guided by the son of God. The son of God's activity is significantly expressed through the verb φωτίζω, 'to enlighten'; its effect is applied to the rational faculty (νοῦς) of souls.[37]

> … you will see the son of God assuming every nature on account of the hallowed souls, so that he may draw her (the soul) out from the place assigned

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[36]Test. 12 in Scott (1936) and 128-129. (…) τὸ δὲ προσηγορικὸν ὄνομα Φὼς καλεῖται, ἀφ' οὗ καὶ φῶτας παρηκολούθησε λέγεσθαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους <…> ὅτε ἦν <ὁ> Φὼς ἐν τῷ Παραδείσῳ, διαπνεόμενος ὑπὸ τῆς εἱμαρμένης, ἔπεισαν αὐτὸν <οἱ…>, ὡς ἄκακον <ὄντα> καὶ ἀνενέργητον, ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν παρ' αὐτῶν Ἀδάμ [τὸν ἐκ τῆς εἱμαρμένης], τὸν ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων στοικείων-ὁ δὲ διὰ τὸ ἄκακον οὐκ ἀπεστράφη· οἱ δὲ ἐκαυχῶντο ὡς δεδουλαγωγημένου αὐτοῦ.

[37]For the use of the verb φωτίζω, cf. LXX 4 Ki 17.28; I Ep. Cor.4.5; Ep. Eph.3.9.

(to her) by destiny towards the incorporeal. Look at him assuming all natures, (of a) god, an angel, a man subject to passions; in fact, as he masters everything, he assumes all the natures he wants, and he hearkens to his father, while he passes through each body; enlightening the mind of each (soul), he raised (them) to the happy place, wherever this was and before this (*sc.* substance) becomes material, following him, and by him held out and led towards that light. [38]
[and see the tablet which Cebes wrote][39]

The exhortation to look at the prodigious acts of the figure which is called a 'son of God' creates the atmosphere of a mystical vision, until the reference to the *Tablet of Cebes* indicates that a symbolic, edifying painting or engraving has been described. The qualities that are predicated of the enigmatic being correspond to attributes which in *J & A* characterize Joseph, the man from heaven and the patriarch Jacob. In fact, while the divine son in Zosimus' testimony is said to transform his nature, from divine and incorporeal to human and material, the figure of the angel in the novel is introduced as Joseph's heavenly double, as if the natures were embodied in the characters who are one the counterpart of the other; the distinction between an earthly and a heavenly dimension is maintained in *J & A* by means of a dualistic imagery. The contrast which is presupposed in the material/spiritual realms is rendered through the image of Aseneth's passage from darkness to light, metaphor of the opposite conditions of error leading to death and truth as a means of life. The son of God's action of enlightening human souls might find a parallel in Joseph's prayer of blessing for Aseneth; the rescue of the heroine as a spiritual being will be completed with the news of the man from heaven and the confirmatory miracle of the honeycomb and bees.

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[38] Scott (1936) iv.106; test. 8. [[θεάσῃ τὸν θεοῦ υἱὸν πάντα γινόμενον τῶν ὁσίων ψυχῶν ἕνεκεν, ἵνα αὐτὴν ἐκσπάσῃ ἐκ τοῦ χώρου τῆς εἱμαρμένης ἐπὶ τὸν ἀσώματον. ὅρα αὐτὸν γινόμενον πάντα, θεόν, ἄγγελον, ἄνθρωπον παθητόν· πάντα γὰρ δυνάμενος, πάντα ὅσα θέλει γίνεται, καὶ πατρὶ ὑπακούει, διὰ παντὸς σώματος διήκων· φωτίζων τὸν ἑκάστης νοῦν, εἰς τὸν εὐδαίμονα χῶρον ἀνώρμησεν, ὅπουπερ ἦν καὶ πρὸ τοῦτο σωματικὸν γενέσθαι, αὐτῷ ἀκολουθοῦντα καὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ὀρεγόμενον καὶ ὁδηγούμενον εἰς ἐκεῖνο τὸ φῶς]]
[καὶ βλέψαι τὸν πίνακα ὃν⌐ καὶ βίτος γράψας]

[39] The present translation of the last line in square brackets follows the correction of καὶ βίτος in Κέβητος, which is plausible because of the equivalent pronunciation of αι- ε (*e*) and η-ι (*i*) from the Hellenistic age. This seems to be a reference to the *Tabula Cebetis*, a philosophical text of uncertain date and provenance that represents allegorically the pattern and sense of human life. The text may have read originally τ(ὸν) Π(ίνακα) (τ)ὸν Κέβητος. See Scott (1936) 129, notes to testimonies 13-20. However, cf. Copenhaver (1992) esp. 109-110.

If we go back to the passage above and consider Zosimus' information about the son of God listening to his father we might find a philosophical explanation for Joseph's relationship to Jacob in *J & A*. In fact, when Joseph enters the sacred city of Heliopolis and sees Aseneth at the window of her tower, he asks Pentephres and his household to lead the woman away because, as the narrator informs, he is afraid that she may attempt to seduce him as the Egyptian women used to do. Joseph in fact, the narrator continues, always recollected his father Jacob's admonition not to marry a foreign woman. The passage may be read as an injunction to preserve Jewish culture, which was directed towards fellow-Jews of the Diaspora. In Joseph's direct speech God is evoked as a father of Israel that is, the patriarch Jacob and the whole Jewish nation at one time; the divine presence is visualized as the image of Jacob-Israel which Joseph always evokes before his eyes.

> … in fact Joseph used to say: 'I won't sin against the Lord, the God of my father Israel or in front of my father Jacob'. Indeed Joseph had all the time in front of his eyes the face of his father Jacob and he remembered the warnings of his father. [40]

Thus both the novel of *J & A*, which follows Scripture in this definition, and pagan authors of mystical-philosophical texts in the Hellenistic period and Late Antiquity convey profound religious notions through the figure of the 'son of God'. Angels receive the appellative of sons of God, as well as judges and rulers, the 'children of the Most High'.[41] The figure of the King-Messiah, the real or ideal sovereign over Israel, the Jewish nation, is connoted through the metaphors of creation and the relationship between a father and a son. In *J & A*, Joseph is introduced as a 'son of God' in the positive characters' direct speech. As the firstborn son of God, Joseph in the novel is significantly contrasted to the Pharaoh's firstborn son.[42] Levi, prophet

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[40] *J & A*, 7.4-5: ... διότι ἔλεγεν Ἰωσήφ: 'οὐχ ἁμαρτήσω ἐνώπιον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς μου Ἰσραὴλ οὐδὲ κατὰ πρόσωπον τοῦ πατρός μου Ἰακώβ'. καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ πατρός αὐτοῦ Ἰακὼβ πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ εἶχεν Ἰωσὴφ πάντοτε καὶ ἐμέμνητο τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ πατρός αὐτοῦ.

[41] See the entry 'son of God' in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, by Kohler-Hirsch: an angel-demigod (Gen.vi.2-4); 'children of the Most High' (Ps.lxxxii.6), 'sons of God' (attributed to Israel as a people: Ex.iv.22; Hos.xi.1); the real or ideal king over Israel (II Sam.vii.14, with reference to David and his dynasty).

[42] See e.g. the contrast in Aseneth's speeches, when she at first declares to her father Pentephres that she will marry the Pharaoh's firstborn son rather than Joseph, 'son of the shepherd of Canaan', at *J & A* 4.10-11: … ἀλλὰ γαμήσομαι τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ βασιλέως Φαραὼ τῷ πρωτοτόκῳ, ὅτι αὐτός ἐστι

and wise man, declares to the son of Pharaoh that he and Simeon cannot take part in the evil plot against Joseph because '… we are men who worship God, and our father (Jacob/Israel) is a friend of the Most High God, and Joseph our brother is like the firstborn son of God'.[43] Therefore family-relations are exploited to a degree of symbolism in the Hellenistic Jewish novel of *J & A*: Joseph is at the same time son of God, of Jacob and of Pharaoh, so that the hero embodies the history of the Jews living in Egypt and in other lands of the Diaspora.

In conclusion, *J & A* can be defined as an enigmatic novel, a label where the adjective aims to signify that religious mysticism is depicted through images pregnant with deeper senses. In fact, *J & A* is allegorical because its profound religious significance is supported by the use of expressions and imagery that illustrate concepts. These literary-rhetorical devices link *J & A* to both Jewish narrative and exegesis and to ancient pagan mysticism, as it is rendered in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and in mystical-philosophical treatises, such as the works of the alchemist Zosimus of Panopolis. Communal traits in the texts explored are indeed the use of family relations, such as father and son, to illustrate the divine presence informing the world and God's attitude towards human beings and all creation, the complex nature and role of divine envoys, the strategy of the annunciation and an ongoing dualism investing the human/divine nature, matter/spirit, and the symbolic darkness/light. The following paragraphs will hopefully specify the presence of enigmatic-symbolic elements in *J & A* as a witness to various religious cultures.

βασιλεὺς πάσης τῆς γῆς Αἰγύπτου; but as soon as she sees Joseph from her window, Aseneth regrets that she did not know Joseph as a son of God: οὐκ ᾔδειν ὅτι Ἰωσὴφ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστιν, at *J & A*, 6.3.

[43] *J & A*, 23.11.

2.2.2 Symbolic Elements in *J & A* (πνεῦμα-φῶς) and Inter-relations of Mystical Exegesis in Pagan, Jewish and Early Christian Contexts.

In *C.H.* I, after Poimandres has returned to his proper place in the superior dimension, joining the 'potencies' (δυνάμεις), which constitute the archetypal light, the ego-narrator of the vision starts announcing to men 'the beauty of piety and knowledge',[44] as if he were undertaking the role of a messenger. To the people gathering to hear his admonition, the seer recommends conversion using a dualistic, figurative language. As we shall see, a theoretical system seems to be embedded in the imagery of *J & A*, which recalls Hermetic lore. In fact, a positive change of mind (μετάνοια) is recognised as necessary for salvation, while the convert will be taking part in immortality (ἀθανασία) rather than in error (πλάνη), ignorance (ἀγνοία) and corruption (φθορά). The expression ἀπαλλάγητε τοῦ σκοτεινοῦ φωτός, literally 'flee from the dark light',[45] contains an oxymoron that combines darkness and light, the opposites signifying spiritual perdition and life in *J & A*.

> Why have you surrendered yourself to death, earthborn men, since you have the right to share in immortality? You who have journeyed with error, who have partnered with ignorance (τῇ ἀγνοίᾳ), think again (μετανοήσατε): escape the shadowy light (ἀπαλλάγητε τοῦ σκοτεινοῦ φωτός); leave corruption behind (καταλείψαντες τὴν φθοράν) and take a share in immortality (μεταλάβετε τῆς ἀθανασίας).[46]

In *J & A* Joseph's speech to instruct Aseneth and her entourage about the customs and rituals of the elected people belonging in the same cultural group envisions two opposite conditions, which are depicted in similar terms as an intellectual choice of ethics. The three ambivalent substances, bread, cup and ointment, refer to the use of food and drink and to the care of the body as a synecdoche or, the part standing for

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[44] *C.H. I.*27: καὶ ἤργμαι κηρύσσειν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας καὶ γνώσεως κάλλος.

[45] In this case, should the genitive φωτός refer to an archetypal human being that belongs in darkness or to the dark side which ought to be rejected in every man, the rhetorical figure, with the dualistic concept embedded into it, would be lost. The textual conjecture is mentioned by Ramelli (2006) 102, n. 71.

[46] *C.H. I.*28: Τί ἑαυτούς, ὦ ἄνδρες γηγενεῖς, εἰς θάνατον ἐκδεδώκατε, ἔχοντες ἐξουσίαν τῆς ἀθανασίας μεταλαβεῖν; μετανοήσατε, οἱ συνοδεύσαντες τῇ πλάνῃ καὶ συγκοινωνήσαντες τῇ ἀγνοίᾳ· ἀπαλλάγητε τοῦ σκοτεινοῦ φωτός, μεταλάβετε τῆς ἀθανασίας, καταλείψαντες τὴν φθοράν. Transl. by Copenhaver (1992).

the whole, for daily-life actions and rituals; significantly, the repetition of the terms for 'blessing' (εὐλογεῖ, εὐλογημένον, Latin *benedicit*, *benedictum*), and the stress on the 'mouth' as the means to pronounce the blessing and partake of the 'bread of life', evokes the concept of articulation in religious belief and the communication of the divine word. In the following passage from the novel the themes of 'immortality' (ἀθανασία) and 'incorruptibility' (ἀφθαρσία) represent a point of contact with the excerpt from the *Poimandres*. From both texts emerges that salvation is achieved through symbolic food and drink, which passing through the mouth, like elements standing for words and speech, have the power to provoke either a positive or a negative outcome. In *J & A* the bread of life, cup of immortality and ointment of incorruptibility are contrasted to the same elements on the table of idols, bearing strangulation, loss and downfall.

> Καὶ εἶπεν Ἰωσήφ· 'οὐκ ἔστι προσῆκον ἀνδρὶ θεωσεβεῖ, ὃς εὐλογεῖ τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ τὸν θεὸν τὸν ζῶντα καὶ ἐσθίει ἄρτον εὐλογημένον ζωῆς καὶ πίνει ποτήριον εὐλογημένον ἀθανασίας καὶ χρίεται χρίσματι εὐλογημέν<ῳ> ἀφθαρσίας, φιλῆσαι γυναῖκα ἀλλοτρίαν, ἥτις εὐλογεῖ τῷ στόματι αὐτῆς εἴδωλα νεκρὰ καὶ κωφὰ καὶ ἐσθίει ἐκ τῆς τραπέζης αὐτῶν ἄρτον ἀγχόνης καὶ πίνει ἐκ τῆς σπονδῆς αὐτῶν ποτήριον ἐνέδρας καὶ χρίεται χρίσματι ἀπωλείας.[47]
> And Joseph said: 'It is not appropriate for a man who reveres God, who blesses with his mouth the living God and eats blessed bread of life and drinks a blessed cup of immortality and anoints himself with a blessed oil of incorruptibility, to kiss a foreign woman, who blesses with her mouth dead and dumb idols and eats from her table bread of strangulation and drinks from her libations a cup of deceitfulness and anoints herself with oil of downfall.'

In the narrative framework of *C.H.* I, before pronouncing his exhortation to human beings, the seer thanks and blesses Poimandres, the father of all beings;[48] the speech opens with the warning for mortal men to change their pattern of drunkenness, irrational sleep and ignorance and to become sober: Ὦ λαοί, ἄνδρες γηγενεῖς, οἱ μέθῃ καὶ ὕπνῳ ἑαυτοὺς ἐκδεδωκότες καὶ τῇ ἀγνωσίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, νήψατε,

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[47] *J & A*, 8.5.

[48] *C.H.* I.27: ἐγὼ δὲ εὐχαριστήσας καὶ εὐλογήσας τὸν πατέρα τῶν ὅλων…

παύσασθε δὲ κραιπαλώντες, θελγόμενοι ὕπνῳ ἀλόγῳ.[49] Although there is no exact correspondence with the three elements of bread-cup-ointment in *J & A*, both texts relate the concept of a 'change of heart' to salvation while the acquisition of knowledge to escape a plight in ignorance is expressed through the metaphor of physical needs such as drink and sleep.

Aseneth's change of mind, a universal *exemplum* for humanity, is expressed through the metaphor of creation and rebirth. In Joseph's prayer of blessing for Aseneth the God of Jacob-Israel is addressed, so that Aseneth may be brought from darkness to light, like the primordial matter in the account of Genesis.[50] With a passage from the physical plane to the spiritual realm of being, the condition of light is associated with truth and life, while darkness becomes the emblem of error and death. The language of the prayer shifts from the semantic field of cosmogony and the creation of living beings to the concept of gnosis. Thus, Aseneth's change of mind is transferred to the universal sphere of the cosmos, and the solemn background implies that she is not only an Egyptian woman and a biblical mother, but also the hypostasis of a religious conception. On the stylistic level the threefold plea to the Lord, which is emphasized by the use of the preposition ἀνα- in the verbs that express Aseneth's passage to a transformed existence, explicitly evokes God's intervention by means of His spirit.

Lord, God of my father Israel
The Most High, the powerful one of Jacob
You who have given life to every created being
And have called them from darkness to light
And from error to the truth
And from death to life
You Lord bless this virgin
And renew her with your spirit
And re-create her with your hand (…)
And revivify her with your life…[51]

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[49]*C.H.* I.27: 'People, earthborn men, you who have surrendered yourselves to drunkenness and sleep and ignorance of god, make yourselves sober and end your drunken sickness, for you are bewitched in unreasoning sleep'.
[50]Genesis 1.3.
[51]*J & A*, 8.10-11: Κύριε ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρός μου Ἰσραὴλ
ὁ ὕψιστος ὁ δυνατὸς τοῦ Ἰακὼβ
ὁ ζωοποιήσας τὰ πάντα
καὶ καλέσας ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους εἰς τὸ φῶς

Divine creation of the world is also explicitly mentioned in *J & A*. During his first visit to Heliopolis, after dining with Pentephres and his household, Joseph declines his host's offer to spend the night there, because that day commemorates God's Creation, so that Joseph intends to leave for one week and return on the eighth day: 'No, I shall leave today (σήμερον), because this is the day in which God started to make His work, and in the eighth day I shall return again (πάλιν) to your house and I shall spend the night here'.[52] Chronological indicators in the passage are pregnant with underlying significance. In fact, the notion of σήμερον transcends the plain value of 'today' to denote an indefinite time, analogous to the concept of αἰών, as Philo of Alexandria testifies.[53] In addition the adverb πάλιν, like reiteration of the preposition ἀνα- in the verbs of Joseph's prayer of blessing, may hint at the prodigious 'rebirth' which Aseneth experiences, becoming a universal model for all the people who repent in the name of the Most High God.

Ultimately, Joseph's promise to return on the eighth day recalls further religious notions; as Sabrina Inowlocki has pointed out, Aseneth's seven days of ascetic prayer and ritual mourning correspond to the week of divine creation, leading to her mystical rebirth, whereas the eighth day sees the apparition of the heavenly man and Joseph's return, adding an original religious symbol. A close parallel to the passage of *J & A* can be found in the Gnostic text 'Writing without title', which mentions the apparition of a luminous Adam on the eighth day.[54] Indeed, Joseph is

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καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς πλάνης εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν
καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν
σὺ κύριε εὐλόγησον τὴν παρθένον ταύτην
καὶ ἀνακαίνισον αὐτὴν τῷ πνεύματί σου
καὶ ἀνάπλασον αὐτὴν τῇ χειρί σου (...)
καὶ ἀναζωοποίησον αὐτὴν τῇ ζωῇ σου...

[52] *J & A*, 9.5.

[53] E.g. Philo, *On flight and finding*, (*de fuga et inventione*), 56-57. In the passage Philo communicates the results of his speculation by means of the hypostasis of 'Consideration' (σκέψις): this female figure has revealed to him that bad people are already dead while still living, whereas good people are granted a life forever. The notion of a 'today' that equals eternity is contained in the quotation from Deuteronomy 4.4, which represents 'the holy oracles': 'You that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive all of you at this day'. I deal more extensively with the theme of αἰών in the next section 2.3.

[54] Inowlocki (2002) 128-129.

depicted as a figure of light in Aseneth's soliloquy while he may represent the primordial man according to myths of creation.[55] In addition, Joseph's blessing triggers Aseneth's change of heart, which is depicted in cosmological terms. In fact, while the heroine is lamenting and beseeching the God of Joseph, she wears a black dress of mourning, which can be read as a symbol of the raw matter in Creation. The ashes spread on the floor, while Aseneth's tears mix with the cinder, form a mud (πηλός), 'like on a large road'.[56] The mud may indeed illustrate the primitive matter and the clay which God used to create the world and Adam in the account of *Genesis*.

Aseneth's change of heart is thus represented, apparently in novelistic terms, but also as a mystical transformation, which will be visible in her new glorious appearance. The passage from darkness to light which is expounded by Joseph is therefore projected onto Aseneth's ritual by means of symbolic elements: the black tunic is symbolic of darkness and chaotic matter before creation, while the ashes that form a mud with her tears recall the primordial material. We can specify these references to mystical knowledge by noticing that they constitute specific points of contact with alchemic and Gnostic texts. In fact, as Régine Charron has argued in a comparative study between the alchemic writings of Cleopatra, a woman alchemist[57] and the Gnostic texts of Nag Hammadi, in particular the *Apocryphon of John*, in the first centuries A.D. alchemy applied to metals was conceived as a philosophy with practical effects on the surrounding world. The arcane technique to convert raw metals into gold was described as the power to control the spirit (πνεῦμα) of gold, which transforms a dark, inert material in a luminous and noble substance. The process of metal-working has not to be read literally, but mostly allegorically; the description of the passages needed to trigger the transformation hints at a spiritual

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[55] *J & A*, 6.2-8 and cf. next section 2.2.2.

[56] *J & A*, 10.17. See Inowlocki (2002) 124: Philo of Alexandria in the treatise *On the creation of the world*, *De opificio mundi* 38, uses the same term, πηλός, to indicate the mixing of salted water and soil on the third day of creation.

[57] Charron (2005) 443: the alchemical source text is one of the most ancient of the collection, dating in the first-third centuries AD; it is known as the 'Dialogue of the philosophers and Cleopatra', and appears in the three most ancient alchemical manuscripts, namely the Venetian *Marcianus Graecus* 299 (= *M*), from the tenth to eleventh century, the *Parisinus Graecus* 2325 (= *B*), from the thirteenth century, the *Parisinus Graecus* 2327 (= *A*), from the fifteenth century. The 'Dialogue' was originally part of the 'Teaching of Comarius' but also circulated as an independent writing.

change. The first action that prompts mutation consists in dyeing (βάπτειν, βαπτίζειν) the metal in sulphur water (ὕδωρ θεῖον). It is noteworthy that the words defining the process convey an underlying sense: βαπτίζειν can indicate the ritual of immersion in water for the initiates and converts to Jewish and Christian religion, while ὕδωρ θεῖον means both 'sulphur' and 'divine' water. The allegorical imagery of *J & A* can be better understood if we consider parallels with these mystical-philosophical texts.

In the framework of a dialogue, a group of philosophers ask wise Cleopatra to instruct them in the art of gold-making, which involves the knowledge of a twofold reality, consisting in a superior spiritual realm and a lower plane of things material; communication between the two dimensions is admitted, so that the spirit can assume a material body and the matter can become spiritual. Thus, the process of metal transformation illustrates the spiritual journey of the soul. In the first stage of the pattern, life-giving blessed waters (τὰ ὕδατα εὐλογημένα) descend to the lowest place, Hades, to awaken the dead who lie in darkness and gloom (ἐν σκότει καὶ γνόφῳ) with a 'medicine of life' (τὸ φάρμακον τῆς ζωῆς).[58] The dead who are being rescued by the life-giving waters lie in chains, imprisoned in their spirit as well as in their body; their coming back to life is illustrated as an awakening from sleep.[59] The successive phase sees the spirit of darkness, full of vanity and weakness of heart (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ σκοτεινὸν τὸ πλῆρες ματαιότητος καὶ ἀθυμίας)[60] being defeated by the spirit of light, which filling the body makes the soul and spirit rejoice, while darkness fades away: τότε φωτίζεται τὸ σῶμα καὶ χαίρεται ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ὅτε ἀπέδρα τὸ σκότος ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος.[61] The soul calls the enlightened body, exhorting it to wake up, arising from death and coming out of darkness; this will be the rescuing effect of the 'medicine of life', which is

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[58]Following Charron (2005), I quote from M. Berthelot & Ch.-E. Ruelle, *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*, Paris, 1888. Vol. I: Introduction; vol II: Greek text; vol. III: French translation, hereafter cited *CAAG*.
[59]*CAAG* II 292.18-293.7-9.
[60]*CAAG* II 296.8-9.
[61]*CAAG* II 296. 13-16: 'Thus the body is enlightened while the soul and spirit rejoice because the darkness has fled from the body'.

reflected in the new clothing of the body, spirituality and divinity.[62] The new garments of light are described as glorious, shining like fire: ὅταν δὲ ἐνδύσωνται τὴν δόξαν ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ τὴν χροιὰν τὴν περιφανῆ; ἐνεδύσατο γὰρ θεότητος φῶς καὶ ἀπέδρα ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τὸ σκότος; καὶ (τὸ πῦρ) ἐνέδυσεν αὐτοὺς θείαν δόξαν πνευματικὴν.[63] When the process is accomplished successfully, the coming together of soul and spirit in the body is described as a sacred marriage in which the bride and the groom become one and live in a perfect dwelling-place, forming a complete entity: Ἰδοὺ γὰρ τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς τέχνης τῶν συζευχθέντων νυμφίου τε καὶ νύμφη καὶ γεγομένων ἕν, 'Behold the fulfilment of the art in the joining together of the bride and the groom, and in their becoming one!'; καὶ ἡνώθησαν πάντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ, τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ γεγόνασιν ἕν, 'and they were all united in love, the body, the soul and the spirit, and had become one'; καὶ ἐτελειώθη ἡ εἰκὼν (ὁ οἶκος)[64] σώματι καὶ ψυχῇ καὶ πνεύματι καὶ ἐγένοντο ἕν 'and the image (the dwelling-place) was made perfect for the body, the soul and the spirit, and they became one'.[65]

The description of these subsequent phases in the transformation of dark metals into shining gold contains less of a metal-working technique than a mystical doctrine about salvation of the human soul. In *J & A*, the imagery of Aseneth's transformation through her ritual of confession, the visit of the man from heaven and her eventual glorious appearance present analogies with the alchemical excerpts surveyed above. Indeed, Aseneth's plight before her mystical transformation is sketched metaphorically as a life in darkness. Therefore Joseph pleads the God of his fathers to bless her (εὐλόγησον τὴν παρθένον ταύτην), infusing in her a new spirit of life: ἀνακαίνισον αὐτὴν τῷ πνεύματί σου.[66] This God, demiurge and saviour (ὁ

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[62] *CAAG* II 296. 16-19: 'You have been clothed with spirituality and divinity', ἐνδέδυσαι γὰρ πνευμάτωσιν καὶ θείωσιν.
[63] See, in the order, *CAAG* II 293.16-17: 'when, however, they clothe themselves with the glory and shining colour which comes from fire'; 297.4-5: 'for (the body) has put on the light of divinity and darkness has fled from it'; 297.14: 'and (fire) clothed them with divine spiritual glory'.
[64] The 'house' or mystical dwelling-place where the body, soul and spirit are eventually gathered as a new entity is actually a variant reading of 'image'.
[65] *CAAG* II 294.18-19; 297.4-5; 297.14.
[66] *J & A*, 8.10-11.

ζωοποιήσας τὰ πάντα), has called the world from darkness to light, from error to truth and from death to life; Joseph states that God can enact the same transformation on Aseneth (καὶ ἀνάπλασον αὐτὴν τῇ χειρί σου (…) καὶ ἀναζωοποίησον αὐτὴν τῇ ζωῇ σου…).

The divine call to life and superior awareness is analogous to the awakening of human souls in Hades by means of the 'living waters' according to the treatise of Cleopatra the alchemist. Descriptive elements support a comparison between the mystical treatises and *J & A*. Aseneth decides to start her ritual of repentance in the solitude of her rooms, where she picks her 'tunic black like darkness' (καὶ ἐξήνεγκε χιτῶνα μελανὸν καὶ ζοφώδη), which signifies grief and mourning, because the narrator informs that Aseneth wore the tunic when her younger brother died.[67] When the man from heaven appears to Aseneth, he exhorts her to stand up on her feet, after she had fallen on the floor overwhelmed by the unbearable light that accompanied the apparition.[68] The encouragement to stand up may be read as a parallel to the awakening and arising of the human souls from Hades, as in the alchemic writings. Before he can convey the word of God, the messenger from heaven also commands that Aseneth changes her black tunic and sackcloth of mourning for a new dazzling-white linen dress and washes away the ashes from her head and face with 'living water':

> καὶ ἀνέστη Ἀσενέθ καὶ ἔστη ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας αὐτῆς. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος· »βάδιζε καὶ ἀπόθου τὸν χιτῶνα ὃν ἐνδέδυσαι τὸν μελανὸν τοῦ πένθους σου καὶ τὸν σάκκον ἀπόθου ἀπὸ τῆς ὀσφύος σου καὶ ἀποτίναξον τὴν τέφραν ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς σου καὶ νίψαι τὸ πρόσωπόν σου καὶ τὰς χειράς σου ὕδατι ζῶντι· καὶ ἔνδυσαι στολὴν λινῆν καινὴν ἄθικτον καὶ ἐπίσημον καὶ ζῶσαι τὴν ὀσφὺν σου τὴν ζώνην σου τὴν καινὴν τὴν διπλῆν τῆς παρθενίας σου.[69]
>
> And Aseneth stood up and stayed on her feet and the man said to her: 'Go and take off the black dress of your grief which you have been wearing and the penitential hair shirt from your flanks and shake the cinder out of your head

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[67] *J & A*, 10.8-9: καὶ οὗτος ἦν ὁ χιτὼν πένθους αὐτῆς, ὅτε ἀπέθανεν ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτῆς ὁ νεώτερος.

[68] *J & A*, 14.11-12: Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος πρὸς αὐτήν· »θάρσει, Ἀσενέθ, καὶ μὴ φοβηθῇς, ἀλλ'ἀνάστηθι καὶ στῆθι ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας σου, καὶ λαλήσω πρός σε τὰ ῥήματά μου.« Cf. the same exhortation to stand up at *J & A*, 14.8.

[69] *J & A*, 14.12.

> and wash your face and your hand with living water; and put on the linen dress new untouched and distinguished and girdle your flanks with your new double belt of your virginity.'

The theme of the light as emanation of the inner virtue of the soul characterizes Joseph's portrayal when the hero enters Heliopolis and is described through Aseneth's eyes as a radiant figure of light. Indeed, Aseneth recognizes Joseph's true nature as soon as she can contemplate his glorious appearance. In her soliloquy, Joseph is introduced as the sun descended from heaven, similar to the light (φῶς) that shines on earth. The rhetorical question that highlights Joseph's extraordinary nature by mentioning the blessed womb of his mother can be compared to the philosophers' acknowledgement to Cleopatra in the philosophical-alchemical dialogue: 'Blessed is the womb that bore you'.[70]

> And now… the sun from heaven has come to us on its chariot and entered our house today, and shines in it like a light upon the earth. (λάμπει εἰς αὐτὴν ὡς φῶς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς…) But I (…) did not know that Joseph is a son of God. For who among men on earth will generate such beauty, and what womb of a woman will give birth to such light? (…) And where shall I flee and hide, because every hiding place he sees and nothing hidden escapes him, because of the great light that is inside him?' (καὶ ποῦ ἀπελεύσομαι καὶ κρυβήσομαι/ὅτι πᾶσαν ἀποκρυβὴν αὐτὸς ὁρᾷ /καὶ οὐδὲν κρυπτὸν λέληθεν αὐτὸν διὰ τὸ φῶς τὸ μέγα τὸ ὂν ἐν αὐτῷ); 'And now, let my father give me to Joseph for a maidservant and slave (εἰς παιδίσκην καὶ εἰς δούλην), and I will serve him (*sc.* Joseph, δουλεύσω αὐτῷ) forever and ever (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον). [71]

The motif of 'love at first sight', which Aseneth appears to experience, is a τόπος of the ancient novel illustrating the sudden, indomitable effects of love. But the classical motif of the *ut vidi ut perii* is transferred in a religious, mystical dimension. Moreover, in the hypothesis that the novel followed the pattern of Philo of Alexandria's philosophical interpretation of the biblical text, Joseph as a figure of the Sun may represent the mind, the male principle able to discern the intelligible truth. Philo's imagery in the following quotation is similar to Joseph's portrayal in Aseneth's words: like the man guilty of presumption in the Alexandrian philosopher,

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[70] *CAAG* II, 298.12. This has been recognized as an 'allusion to the Gospel of Luke': *Luke*, 11.27, Charron (2005) 452.
[71] *J & A*, 6. 2-8.

the heroine of the novel cannot escape from the divine prophetic power, which is embodied by Joseph; following Joseph's precepts, she literally passes from a doctrine of darkness, death and error, to attain the opposite condition of light, truth and a new life.

> If, therefore, the understanding which fancies itself and not God to be the cause of all that comes into existence die, that is, shrink into inactivity, blood-guiltiness does not pertain to it (οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτῇ φόνος); it (*sc.* The faculty that presumes to be the cause of things coming into being, rather than acknowledging God as the only primary cause) has not gone the full length of abolishing the living doctrine which ascribes to God the totality of powers. But if the sun shall have risen, that is the mind that shines so brilliantly in us (ἐὰν δὲ ἀνατείλῃ ὁ ἥλιος, τουτέστιν ὁ φαινόμενος λαμπρὸς νοῦς ἐν ἡμῖν), and shall have conceived the notion that it discerns all things (καὶ δόξῃ πάντα διορᾶν), and decides all things (καὶ πάντα βραβεύειν) and that nothing ever escapes it (καὶ μηδὲν ἐκφεύγειν ἑαυτόν), he is guilty, he shall die in requital for the living doctrine which he destroyed (ἀνταποθανεῖται τοῦ ἐμψύχου δόγματος ὃ ἀνεῖλε), which acknowledges God as the sole Cause. For he is found futile and dead indeed in himself (εὑρισκώμενος ἄπρακτος καὶ νεκρὸς ὄντως αὐτός); he has come forward as the author of a lifeless, mortal, and erroneous doctrine (ἀψύχου καὶ θνητοῦ καὶ πλημμελοῦς δόγματος εἰσηγητὴς γεγενημένος).[72]

Aseneth's mystical transformation is eventually represented as her change of physical appearance, when she turns into a figure of light, hard to recognize even for her foster-father who loves her as a daughter.[73] Remembering that her foster-father noticed with regret her fallen face, Aseneth thinks of reviving her countenance before Joseph can see her; she then plans to use 'pure water from the spring' (ὕδωρ καθαρὸν ἀπὸ τῆς πηγῆς)[74], and when she bends on the basin of pure water her image reflects the light of the sun and the morning star, elements recalling the

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[72] *Leg. All.*, 3.35.

[73] Soon after the man from heaven has departed, a young servant comes to announce Joseph's return to Heliopolis; Aseneth calls her foster-father (ὁ τροφεύς) and ask him to prepare the house and a good meal for Joseph, the 'champion of God'; her τροφεύς is saddened by her exhausted face; but after Aseneth has mirrored herself in pure water her radiant new appearance makes him amazed, while he understands that God has elected her as Joseph's bride. See *J & A*, 18.3-11. The character of Aseneth's foster-father or tutor seems to be an invention of the novel, which adds emotional details to the story; this may come from the tradition about the infant Aseneth being exposed by her mother Dinah and rescued by an important personage in Egypt, such as the priest of Heliopolis, who adopted her as his daughter.

[74] *J & A*, 18.8.

descriptions of Joseph and the man from heaven. In fact, Aseneth emanates light of wisdom and knowledge like Joseph in the description of her soliloquy, while her eyes have become like the rising morning star which announces the descent of the man from heaven.

> Καὶ ἐνέκυψεν Ἀσενὲθ νίψασθαι τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς καὶ ὁρᾶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς ἐν τῷ ὕδατι· καὶ ἦν ὡς ὁ ἥλιος καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτῆς ὡς ἑωσφόρος ἀνατέλλων… καὶ ὡς εἶδεν Ἀσενὲθ ἑαυτὴν ἐν τῷ ὕδατι, ἐθαμβήθη ἐπὶ τῇ ὁράσει καὶ ἐχάρη χαρὰν μεγάλην καὶ οὐκ ἔνιψε τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς, εἶπε γάρ· »μήποτε ἀποπλύνω τὸ κάλλος τὸ μέγα τοῦτο«
> And Aseneth bent to wash her face and saw her face in the water; and it was like the sun and her eyes were like the rising morning star… and when Aseneth saw herself in the water, she was amazed at the sight and rejoiced of a great joy and did not wash her face, as she said: 'Lest I wash away this great beauty'.

In the context of *J & A*, a religious writing with features of an erotic novel, the embrace and kiss of the protagonists assume a religious significance transcending the love-blissful marriage motif. The scene of Joseph and Aseneth's kisses highlights the reciprocity (ἀλλήλους, ἀμφότεροι) of their communication of wisdom with the image of their holding each other in their arms, while exchanging their πνεῦμα. In this imagery, Joseph and Aseneth seem to undergo a transformation in their material substance involving their soul and identity, until they become one thing, like the metals joined in the mystical process of transformation according to Cleopatra the alchemist. The three spirits, which Joseph blows into Aseneth, add to the semantic field of creation an elaborate theoretical notion explaining life, wisdom and truth, a triad of elements corresponding to the concepts enumerated in Joseph's prayer.

> ἠσπάσαντο ἀλλήλους ἐπιπολὺ καὶ ἀνέζησαν ἀμφότεροι τῷ πνεύματι αὐτῶν. καὶ <κατεφίλησεν> ὁ Ἰωσὴφ τὴν Ἀσενὲθ καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῇ πνεῦμα ζωῆς καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτὴν τὸ δεύτερον καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῇ πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτὴν τὸ τρίτον καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῇ πνεῦμα ἀληθείας.[75]
> (Joseph and Aseneth) embraced each other for a long time and both came to life in their spirit. And Joseph kissed Aseneth and gave her spirit of life, and he kissed her the second time and gave her spirit of wisdom, and he kissed her the third time and gave her spirit of truth.

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[75] *J & A*, 19.10

If it seems evident that the role of Aseneth as νύμφη of Joseph forever transcends the sphere of a novelistic love-story that ends in familiar happiness, the profound sense of *J & A* is not so immediate to define. In fact religious themes and learned references to Jewish, Classical and early-Christian texts emerge from the extant texts of *J & A*. It is not possible to explain entirely the novel on the basis of a unique, unambiguous interpretation. On the contrary, a plurality of readings may be pertinent.[76] The possibility of multiple interpretations seems to reflect the poly-cultural environments in which *J & A* was composed and transmitted. Philonenko could identify three subgenres or 'romances' inside the 'romance' of Joseph and Aseneth. The 'roman missionaire', 'roman à clef' and 'roman mystique' correspond in fact to three levels of interpretation.[77] Philonenko's definition of *J & A* as a *mystical novel* was grounded on the religious-allegorical senses which can be detected in the story.[78] Symbolic expressions in *J & A* evoke the ritual language of mysteries hinting at a profound religious significance. In the announcement of the man from heaven, a specific terminology reminiscent of mystery initiation and divine revelation is employed. The ineffable mysteries (ἀπόρρητα μυστήρια), which the heavenly envoy discloses to Aseneth in secret, combine the motif of silence out of awe for the divine and the reference to sacred rituals. The truth is presented as content which cannot be translated into words comprehensible to the human mind. Within this sphere are included the names of angels, of God the Most High and of the divine envoy himself. Accordingly, the realm of being is suggested through symbolic images, such as the 'spirit of life', (πνεῦμα ζωῆς), which is the essence of the honeycomb.

The announcement scene of *J & A* can be read therefore as an allegorical representation of mystical rituals. This interpretation is confirmed when the

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[76] Inowlocki (2002) 131: 'Tout ceci confirme qu'il est vain de chercher un modèle unique pour notre roman: il n'est ni magique, ni initiatique, ni gnostique à proprement parler et pourtant toutes ces lectures semblent pertinentes'.

[77] Philonenko (1968) 53-98.

[78] The genre of the novel in antiquity has been compared to aretalogies, texts in verses celebrating the virtues of divinities or heroes, such as Isis, Dionysius and Asclepius. On the novel and aretalogy see Beck in Schmeling (1996): *J & A* is mentioned as a likely example of most allegorical Greek-Jewish novel.

honeycomb is consumed by fire that arises prodigiously from the table, this representing the sacrificial offering of a chosen substance, without the need to slay any victim.[79] In Hellenic culture, sacrifices without shedding blood (νηφάλια) or pouring the wine that symbolises blood itself were reserved to chthonic deities, such as the Furies or Erinyes. As the honeycomb represents emblematically divine speech and the word of God (λόγος), its burning may also correspond to the 'pure offerings of the word', which are treated in the *Corpus Hermeticum* as λογικαὶ θυσίαι and recur in Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* as λογικὴ λατρεία as well as in the Jewish apocryphon *Testament of Levi*.[80] Thus, the blending of Jewish religious concepts and hints at pagan mysticism make the announcement scene a valuable testimony of the Hellenistic origins of *J & A*.

Moreover, *J & A* shares religious concepts and the dualistic outlook which is reflected in its imagery with Jewish and early-Christian intellectual circles. The sharp distinction between the material world and the intelligible realm was expressed in Platonic terms: to an ideal dimension of pure forms corresponds the inferior plane of matter. This theme is recurring to reflect the worldview of Gnostic texts, which contain plenty of fiction and present important analogies with *J & A*.[81] If we continue our survey with the Church Fathers' exegesis, we will see that Origen comments on the motif of the light as opposed to darkness following allegorical readings of Jewish Scripture in the Alexandrian philosophical tradition. The dichotomy darkness/light, a figurative pattern in *J & A*, is explained by Origen as the opposite dimensions of matter and spirit. On the deeper level of interpretation, the light is the allegorical, true sense of the word of God, which brings eternal life, whereas darkness becomes the literal sense, antithesis of salvation. The following quotation shows Origen's explanation of the term-concept φῶς in its physical-spiritual connotations.

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[79] *J & A*, 17.3: καὶ εὐθέως ἀνέβη πῦρ ἐκ τῆς τραπέζης καὶ κατέφαγε τὸ κηρίον καὶ τὴν τράπεζαν οὐκ ἠδίκησεν.

[80] See Scarpi (2008) LII, n. 5.

[81] For instance, as Sabrina Inowlocki has pointed out, the motifs of the kiss, the spouse and the bridegroom and their nuptial chamber in heaven occur in the apocryphal *Gospel of Philip*, while in the Nag-Hammadi text known as the *Writing without title*, as we have seen, Adam as a figure of light is bound to come back on the eight day, like Joseph, who is preceded by the man from heaven, another figure of light. See Inowlocki (2002) esp. 126-132.

> The term φῶς (light) is, in fact, employed in two ways, according to the matter and according to the spirit that is, intelligible, and while the Scriptures may define it invisible, the Greeks would call it incorporeal.[82]

It is noteworthy that both the sacred Scripture of Jews and Christians and the Hellenic heritage are acknowledged in Origen's interpretation of the intelligible meaning of 'light'. Cultural sources are presented as different only in their use of the Greek attributes, which reflect two ways of expressing the same concept.

2.2.3 *J & A*, the Jewish-Hellenistic Narrative and *aggada*.

On the grounds of thematic parallels which reflect a particular Jewish ideology, the novel of *J & A* can fit in the context of the Jewish *aggada* that is, the exegesis on the biblical text, which is rewritten and expanded in new fictional stories. The *aggada* usually consists in a narrative which was distinguished by medieval Rabbis[83] as the historical exegesis on the sacred texts complementary to the *halacha*, the legislative-normative writings.[84] Intellectual Jews of the Hellenistic age recognized the validity of the historical record of Israel so that a concept of the narrative *aggada* existed and was conceived as part of Scripture as well as a corpus of parallel traditions. Unlike the Greek historians of the archaic and classical age, Jewish authors in Hellenism and Late Antiquity did not claim to recount the true history of Israel and her cultures as opposed to myth (μῦθος) and fictional stories (πλάσματα). Indeed, the hallowed Scripture, originally written in Hebrew and translated in Greek firstly in the third-second centuries B.C., is deemed to record the story of the Hebrew ancestors from the life in Eden to the allegorical pictures of destruction and future hope prospected in the prophetic books. Narrative genres such as history and romance served the purpose of retelling the wondrous deeds of the ancestors for Jewish authors of the Hellenistic age. The patriarchs' and biblical heroes' stories were expanded with

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[82]Origen, *Commentary to John*, xiii (John, 4.24): διχῶς γὰρ τὸ 'φῶς' ὀνομάζεται, σωματικόν τε καὶ πνευματικόν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ νοητὸν καὶ ὡς μὲν αἱ γραφαὶ ἂν λέγοιεν ἀόρατον, ὡς δ' ἂν Ἕλληνες ὀνομάσαιεν ἀσώματον.

[83] In fact only in the Middle Ages the rabbis produced a classification of literary genres that included, for instance, the folktale, linguistics, halachic writings. See Yassif (1999) 21 for the definition of the biblical Joseph story as a novella that resembles a legend, being anchored in a definite time and place.

[84]See Kamesar (1994a) 38.

variations and either overt or implicit comments in order to illustrate contemporary ethical values, thus praising the Jewish culture which spread throughout the Hellenistic world.

Hellenistic Jewish authors such as Philo of Alexandria made use of allegorical interpretation of the sacred texts, creating new stories with profound senses. The Rabbis composed a heterogeneous corpus of treatises, including didactic narratives and religious-philosophical exegesis on Scripture. The early Christian Fathers knew the aggadic tradition through Syriac culture and the testimonies of their predecessors Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea and Jerome. As Adam Kamesar has shown on the basis of the extant literary evidence, the Church Fathers' approach to the Jewish narrative *aggada* was either critical or partially receptive. The Antiochene Fathers held more reservations towards *aggada*, considering narrative and extensive exegesis of Scripture as unprofitable and vain 'conjecture'. On the other hand, the Alexandrian-Palestinian Fathers, following in the footsteps of Origen and Clement, recognized the Jewish *aggada* as a religious source parallel to Scripture, while evaluating allegorical interpretation of the holy books as a useful instrument of didactics and hermeneutics. It is noteworthy that the Fathers' criticism of *aggada* is not based, as one might suppose, on Christian theological concerns, but on the disagreement with the interpretative method itself; interestingly, this literary-interpretative debate shares points of contact with the ancient and Hellenistic criticism of the allegorical method on the part of Greek and Latin pagan authors, such as Cicero, Quintilian and the Sceptical philosopher Sextus Empiricus.[85]

The tradition of *J & A* may represent a bridge between Jewish-Hellenistic narrative written in Greek in the Hellenistic time and the later Jewish *aggada*, whereas the Christian reception of the novel influenced new stories. Origen has preserved in his commentaries to John and in Genesis excerpts from an otherwise lost pseudepigraphon, the *Prayer of Joseph*. Despite its title, Joseph is not mentioned in the extant text, whereas Jacob is the protagonist, recalling in a first person speech his mystical encounter and wrestle with the angel Uriel. Philonenko considered Jacob's portrayal in *J & A* as a later addition on the original short text of the novel,

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[85] See e. g. Dawson (1992) 52-72.

which is related to the *Prayer*.[86] In fact, significant points of contact with *J & A* can be discerned in the *Prayer*, which may help us to understand how the novel could be read and interpreted in early Christianity. From the extant text it is possible to notice that like *J & A*, the *Prayer* stresses the importance of names: Jacob represents the patriarch on earth, while Israel identifies his angelic counterpart in the heavenly rank.[87] By uttering his heavenly adversary's name and position in the divine hierarchy, Jacob can appropriate Uriel's powers and assert his own authority in the system of being. In fact, Jacob's forefathers, Abraham and Isaac, are also defined as archetypes of human beings preceding the creation of the world. Like Joseph in the novel, Jacob-Israel becomes a firstborn son of God. The title of 'firstborn' among the living beings represents an important theological notion in early Christianity. In the form πρωτότοκος, the same as in the novel, it is an attribute in the description of the Son according to the archaic hymn preserved in Paul's letter to the *Colossians*, as Smith has remarked in the English commentary to the *Prayer*: 'He is the image of the unseen God and the firstborn (πρωτότοκος) of all creation… before anything was created he existed'.[88]

Analogies with *J & A* can be seen in the angelic traits proper of the positive characters. Indeed, the divine messenger is described as Joseph's heavenly counterpart, possibly representing Joseph's heavenly double; in much the same way, the *Prayer of Joseph* introduces Israel as Jacob's equal in the spiritual world. Thus, a dualism between an earthly and a spiritual dimension is exemplified in the figure of

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[86] While recognizing the importance of focusing on points of contact between the *Prayer* and *J & A*, Philonenko remarked that Batiffol eluded the real core of the question when he compared the *Prayer of Joseph* with the Jewish legend of Aseneth daughter of Dinah rather than with *J & A*. Cf. Philonenko (1968) 38-39: 'Batiffol estime que la *Prière de Joseph* e la legende d' Aseneth, fille de Dina, n'ont rien de commun. Le probleme est en vérité mal posé. Ce ne sont pas les liens de la *Prière de Joseph* et de la légende qu'il s'agit d'apprécier, mais bien ceux de la *Prière* et de notre roman.' Different scholarly perspectives can be appreciated: Philonenko considered *J & A* as a Jewish-Hellenistic novel, while Batiffol initially saw his *Livre de la Prière d'Asénèth* as a late-antique Greek re-elaboration of a Jewish legend, part of a rich production in Hebrew and Aramaic, such as rabbinical tracts. This literature, which retells variants of the story of Aseneth, was studied in comparison with *J & A* by Aptowitzer (1924).

[87] The 'man from heaven' in *J & A* only discloses to Aseneth his role in the divine hierarchy: 'I am the chief of the house of the Lord and commander of the whole host of the Most High.' ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ οἴκου κυρίου καὶ στρατιάρχης πάσης στρατιᾶς τοῦ ὑψίστου. (*J & A*, 14.8)

[88] *Prayer of Joseph* in *OTP*, 703. Cf. Colossians 1: 15. 17.

Jacob/Israel who wrestled with an angel of God according to the account of Genesis.[89]

> I, Jacob, who am speaking to you, am also Israel, an angel of God (ἄγγελος θεοῦ) and a ruling spirit (πνεῦμα ἀρχικόν). *Abraham* and Isaac *were created before any work*. But, I, Jacob, who men call Jacob but whose name is Israel am he who *God called Israel* which means, a man seeing God, because I am the *firstborn of every living thing to whom God* gives life (πρωτόγονος παντὸς ζῴου ζωουμένου ὑπὸ θεοῦ). And when I was *coming up from Syria Mesopotamia*, Uriel, the angel of God, came forth and said that I [Jacob-Israel] had *descended to earth* and I had tabernacled among men (κατεσκήνωσα ἐν ἀνθρώποις) and that I had been called by the name of Jacob. He envied me and *fought with me and wrestled with me* saying that his name and *the name that is before every angel* was to be above mine. I told him his name and what rank he held among the sons of God. Are you not Uriel, the eighth after me? And I, Israel, *the archangel of the power of the Lord* and the *chief captain* among the sons of God? (Ἰσραήλ ἀρχάγγελος δυνάμεως κυρίου καὶ ἀρχιχιλίαρχός εἰμι ἐν υἱοῖς θεοῦ). Am I not Israel, the *first minister before the face of God* (λειτουργὸς πρῶτος)? And I called upon my God by the inextinguishable name (ἐν ὀνόματι ἀσβέστῳ).[90]

A one line fragment of the *Prayer of Joseph* from Origen's *Commentary on Genesis* has Jacob declaring that he can predict the future of the next generations by reading the heavenly tablets:

> For I have read in the *tablets of heaven all that shall befall you and your sons*.[91]

As Philonenko pointed out, the short statement recalls Levi's prophetic qualities in *J & A*; Levi in fact reads for Aseneth in secret 'the letters written in the sky', while being able to foresee her 'place of rest' in the highest heavens:

> Καὶ αὐτὸς ἑώρα γράμματα γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἀνεγίνωσκεν αὐτὰ καὶ ἀπεκάλυπτεν αὐτὰ τῇ Ἀσενὲθ κρυφῇ, καὶ ἑώρα Λευὶς τὸν τόπον τῆς καταπαύσεως αὐτῆς ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις. [92]
> And he saw the letters written in heaven and read them and discosed them to Aseneth in secret, and Levi saw her place of rest in the highest.

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[89]Genesis, 32.24-31.
[90]*Prayer of Joseph*, Fragment A translated into English and commented by Smith, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* II (1985) 699-714. Greek passage in Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2. 31; Origen quotes the passage in support of his thesis that John the Baptist was an angel descended on earth in order to bear witness to Jesus.
[91]*Prayer of Joseph,* Fragment B, trans. by Smith (1985) 714. Greek text in Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, 6. 11.64.
[92]*J & A*, 22.9; cf. Philonenko (1968) 39.

As we have seen in treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, family relations assume a symbolic value in revelatory scenes. Aseneth, daughter of the Egyptian priest of Heliopolis in the concise biblical account, becomes a daughter for the patriarch Jacob; thus she announces to Joseph her intention to go and see Jacob, who is like her father and God: πορεύσομαι καὶ ὄψομαι τὸν πατέρα σου διότι ὁ πατήρ σου Ἰσραὴλ ὡς πατήρ μοί ἐστι καὶ θεός.[93] The encounter of Joseph and Aseneth with Jacob is set in the framework of the patriarchs' blessing for their descendants, as in the biblical episode of Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh.[94] In *J & A*, the Patriarch pronounces memorable words in direct speech about Aseneth, his worthy daughter-in-law, who will be blessed by the Most High.[95] Jacob's portrayal was also considered by Philonenko as one of the later additions to the original text of the novel, and compared it to the fragmentary pseudepigraphon, the *Prayer of Joseph*.

> And they (*sc.* Joseph and Aseneth) went in to Jacob. And Israel was sitting on his bed, and he was an old man in comfortable old age (αὐτὸς ἦν πρεσβύτης ἐν γήρει λιπαρῷ). And Aseneth saw him and was amazed at his beauty (καὶ εἶδεν αὐτὸν Ἀσενὲθ καὶ ἐθαμβήθη ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει αὐτοῦ), because Jacob was exceedingly beautiful to look at (καλὸς τῷ εἴδει), and his old age (was) like the youth of a handsome (young) man (ἀνδρὸς ὡραίου), and his head was all white as snow (πᾶσα λευκὴ ὡσεὶ χιὼν), and the hairs of his head were all exceedingly close and thick like (those) of an Ethiopian, and his beard (was) white reaching down to his breast, and his eyes (were) flashing and darting (flashes of) lightning (χαροποιοὶ καὶ ἐξαστράπτοντες), and his sinews and his shoulders and his arms were like those of an angel (ὡς ἀγγέλου), and his thighs and his calves and his feet like (those) of a giant. And Jacob was like a man who had wrestled with God (ὡς ἄνθρωπος ὃς ἐπάλαισε μετὰ θεοῦ). And Aseneth saw him and was amazed, and prostrated herself before him face down to the ground. And Jacob said to Joseph: 'Is this my daughter-in-law, your wife? Blessed she will be by the Most High God.[96]

The religious-symbolic value of the scene is conveyed through the graphic elements of the portrayal: Jacob's appearance is striking, yet the details of his description are

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[93] *J & A*, 22.3.
[94] Genesis 48.
[95] As it will be explained in the next section 2.3, the so called 'Jacob's portrayal' contains points of contact with rabbinic legends about Aseneth.
[96] *J & A*, 22.7-9.

not realistic.[97] The old age and beauty of the patriarch transcend time, thus reflecting Jacob's virtue and extraordinary nature. His names of Jacob and Israel are used as substitutes, while the novel is reworking the biblical text 'between the lines'. Indeed, the statement that Jacob's limbs are similar to those of spiritual creatures, an angel and a giant, as well as the allusion to the wrestle with God, imply the knowledge of the biblical episode of Genesis 32, in which Jacob experienced a mysterious encounter with an emissary of God. When the divine being could not defeat the patriarch and soon before dawn he had to depart, he wrenched Jacob's tight, leaving the patriarch lame. Thus, the reference to Jacob's limbs in *J & A* might hint at this specific detail in the biblical episode, implicitly stating that God's presence was permanently impressed on the forefather's features. Moreover, the details of Jacob-Israel's white hair and beard and his dazzling eyes recall descriptions of divine beings, represented with anthropomorphic features in the biblical text and in apocalyptic writings. Jacob's portrayal might be complementary to the epiphany of the man from heaven in the novel. Therefore, the scene is likely to constitute an 'original' episode of the novel, at least in part of its tradition, while there is no need to surmise that it was a later addition.

> … there was a man in every respect similar to Joseph, by the robe and the crown and the royal staff, except that his face was like lightning, and his eyes like sunshine, and the hairs of his head like a flame of fire of a burning torch, and hands and feet like iron shining forth from a fire, and sparks shot forth from his hands and feet.[98]

In addition, the man from heaven presents Joseph's royal and priestly attributes as symbolic analogues. Extraordinary beings are characterized by the light: the angel's

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[97] Aseneth's portrayal is also symbolic: 'And this girl had nothing similar to the virgins of the Egyptians, but she was in every respect similar to the daughters of the Hebrews; and she was tall (μεγάλη) as Sarah and handsome (ὡραία) as Rebecca and beautiful (καλὴ) as Rachel.'(*J & A*, 1.7-8) The recurring expression that indicates astonishment in front of a character's beauty can be considered as a narrative device to stress inner quality and change of heart; (Pharaoh) ἐθαμβήθη ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει αὐτῆς (*J & A*, 21.4); after her encounter with the heavenly man, Aseneth is astonished to see her own transformed appearance in a basin of water: καὶ ἰδοῦσα Ἀσενὲθ εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἐθαμβήθη ἐπὶ τῇ ὁράσει (*J & A*, 18.10); Joseph is impressed by Aseneth's new glorious looking on his return to Heliopolis: ἰδὼν αὐτὴν ἐθαμβήθη ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει αὐτῆς (*J & A*, 19.4).

[98] *J & A*, 14.9… τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἦν ὡς ἀστραπὴ καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φέγγος ἡλίου καὶ αἱ τρίχες τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλὸξ πυρὸς καὶ αἱ χεῖρες καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὥσπερ σίδερος ἐκ πυρός.

eyes, radiant like sunshine, resemble Joseph's god-like appearance as the sun when he enters Heliopolis; the details of the hair, hands and feet, recall the features of Jacob's portrayal. A parallelism can also be detected between the biblical antecedent and the novel: at the end of his wrestle with the angel, Jacob wanted to ascertain his name, but the emissary of God refused to reveal it; conversely, the angel gave Jacob the new name of Israel because, as the Hebrew etymology suggests, he could see God and survived. In the same context of an encounter between a human and a divine being, Aseneth asks the man from heaven to reveal his name, so that she can remember him in her prayers. The angel replies that his name is unspeakable, only written in the book of the Most High.[99] Eventually, as Jacob becomes Israel, embodiment of the elected nation, Aseneth receives the new name of 'City of Refuge' for all the peoples who change their heart in favour of God.[100]

Jewish-Hellenistic narratives such as the *Prayer of Joseph* reflect a Jewish ideology in the Hellenistic era, as rabbinic literature conveys ethical-religious principles in the following centuries. The position of *J & A* within this rich literature, which extends throughout a long period of time, is controversial. It is in fact noteworthy that the novel may fit well in an early Hellenistic/Graeco-Roman context: *J & A* represents in the heroic biblical past the contemporary situation of Jews living among pagans and establishing positive cultural transactions with alien groups, provided that these are respectful of their ritual laws and/or become proselytes, as Aseneth's story seems to testify. However, the Christian textual transmission of the novel and the vocabulary of its witnesses attest to, if not an influence, at least a relation to the first-second century A.D. Jewish versions of the Septuagint as well as to the New Testament writings. It is thus feasible to infer that *J & A* was either composed or developed in a later Judeo-Christian environment. Although these

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[99]Why do you seek this, my name, Aseneth? My name is in the heavens in the book of the Most High, written by the finger of God … ἵνα τί τοῦτο ζητεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου, Ἀσενέθ; τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς ἐστιν ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ τοῦ ὑψίστου γεγραμμένον τῷ δακτύλῳ τοῦ θεοῦ…(*J & A*, 15.12x)

[100]See e.g. Aptowitzer (1924) 280-281 and note 43. A play by words, effective in Hebrew, is present between the terms אסנת (*'sanet*), which reminds one of the word for 'misfortune, accident',אסון, and חסנת, in which the roots חסה, 'to seek refuge', and חסן, 'to gather together', 'to be strong or fortified'; with the related term מחסה, 'refuge, place of refuge', they form the sense of חסנת, 'place of refuge', 'fortified city'. Eusebius and Jerome explained the name אסון, as σύμπτωμα, *ruina*; Aptowitzer saw in this interpretation a possible allusion to the 'unfortunate birth of Aseneth in the legend of Aseneth's descent'.

considerations may seem idle without a solid basis, we may notice that after all Aptowitzer's view of *J & A* as a fourth-fifth century re-elaboration in Greek of Jewish legends in Hebrew is another possibility. In fact, while *J & A* contains no secure reference to a Christian doctrine, its ethical principles and sketches of a theoretical system were received as Christian by its various audiences from the sixth century.

Similar considerations have been drawn on a Coptic tradition about Joseph's story, which I call the *Narratio Ioseph*, following Dochhorn and Petersen.[101] This tradition is part of the post-biblical literature about Joseph, the representative hero for the Jews of the Diaspora, especially in Egypt. Unlike the tradition of *J & A* the text has been preserved in a fragmentary Coptic papyrus, which was published by Zandee.[102] The story re-elaborates young Joseph's adventures according to *Genesis* 37.15 focusing on his sale as a slave by his brothers in Dothan. While the youth Joseph was looking for his brothers in the desert, an old man appeared to him, offering to guide him to his brothers; the Coptic apocryphon claims that the stranger was the devil in disguise trying to deceive Joseph. When Joseph unmasks him and urges him to leave, the devil is humiliated and ashamed, so that he takes his revenge by spreading hatred and disagreement among the brothers, who firstly plan to kill Joseph, however thanks to Judah's intervention they spare Joseph's life until they sell him into slavery. As in *J & A* and in Philo of Alexandria[103], Joseph's brothers undertake different roles: Judah becomes Joseph's rescuer, while Gad plays the part of the villain as he tries to stone Joseph to death while he is lying in the pit.

By way of an original invention, in the *Narratio Ioseph* the Ishmaelite traders who brought Joseph to Egypt receive the names of Korah and Apion, the former being the name of a biblical personage hostile to Moses and the Jews,[104] and the latter a political opponent to the Jews at Philo's time, as Josephus recorded in the treatise

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[101] Dochhorn and Petersen (1999).
[102] Zandee (1961).
[103] *J & A* does not recollect in details how the brothers sold Joseph into slavery; Philo at *On Joseph* (*Jos*) 15-16 states that 'The fourth eldest brother…advised them to sell him and thus substitute the lesser evil of slavery for the greater evil of death'.
[104] *Num.*, 16 and see Dochhorn and Petersen (1999) 460: Korah and his supporters are described as a rebellious group and associated with Egypt in the pseudepigraphon *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 16.

Against Apion.[105] Therefore, the Coptic apocryphon highlights the necessary development of the story according to the divine plan which will be reiterated in the course of history, from the age of Moses to to the era of Christ. However, as is the case of *J & A*, scholars gave different interpretations of the Coptic Joseph story. Zandee, its first editor, evaluated it as a Christian work written in the monasteries of Egypt; in fact, he read Joseph's encounter with the devil in the desert as a figure of the typical monks' trials and temptations in the desert on account of their enemy. On the other hand, Dochhorn and Petersen refuted this thesis, reading the *Narratio Ioseph* as an early Jewish text that represented both internal and external socio-religious conflicts for Jewish communities. It is thus possible to suppose that texts such as the *Narratio Ioseph* and *J & A* underwent later Christian readings, which did not alter their essentially Jewish content, while attributing new religious significance to the narratives. In Hellenism, Late Antiquity and early Christianity, these texts could therefore be interpreted according to multiple doctrinal lenses.

2.3 The Metaphor of Creation in the Timeless Dimension.

As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, references to divine creation and the imagery of mystical transformation in *J & A* and in Jewish narratives, as well as in Hermetic and alchemical treatises, render profound concepts such as the positive change of heart and conversion to a deeper spiritual awareness of the soul. The recurrent formulaic expression εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον in *J & A* signals the philosophical-religious theme of αἰών which was developed by Jewish, Christian and pagan authors in the Hellenistic time. The expression εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον in the novel can be translated with the ritual formula 'forever and ever', thus envisioning a mystical transcendent dimension in eternity. The formula is thus instrumental to disclose the underlying concept of αἰών which denotes historical ages in the remote past, or in the continuity of time throughout successive generations. Indeed, terms for 'eternity' were used by early Greek philosophers to

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[105] Cf. also Philo's *Legatio ad Gaium*; Apion took part in the delegation to the Roman emperor Gaius Caligula in 38-40 A.D. acting against the Jews. The analogy contained in the name of the personage prompted Zandee's title of his study *Iosephus contra Apionem* which, although witty, as Dochhorn and Petersen remarked, may be misleading, as there is no explicit reference to Josephus or Apion in *Narratio Ioseph*.

indicate the origins of being and of the world, as well as the concepts of uncreated and imperishable; both adjectives αἰώνιος and ἀΐδιος contained these senses, however Plato was the first intellectual to use αἰώνιος 'to express the metaphysical idea of a timeless present'.[106] In the Septuagint the use of αἰώνιος and cognate terms prevails over ἀΐδιος and ἀΐδιότης, which occur only in three instances; similarly, ἀΐδιος recurs only twice in the New Testament. The significance of the adjectives changes, with αἰώνιος designating either the time to come in the hereafter or a limited, albeit long, section of time, an era marked by successive generations, while ἀΐδιος is interpreted by Church Fathers such as Origen, deeply learned in Platonic and Stoic philosophy, as a proper limitless time.

As we shall see in the present literary survey, the use of the formula εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον in significant passages of *J & A* testifies to the relation of the narrative to the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Scripture, as well as to points of contact with Philo of Alexandria's exegesis and the outlook expressed in the New Testament and early Christian authors. Before embarking in the survey of the occurrences of εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον in *J & A* I point out a crucial point in the novel for the interpretation of the concept. As Ilaria Ramelli has remarked, in Aseneth's confession an opposition is outlined between the goods of the earth and those of the other world: 'All the riches of my father are ephemeral, bound to the present time and destined to disappear (πρόσκαιρα καὶ ἀφανῆ), whereas the gifts of your inheritance, o Lord, are incorruptible (ἄφθαρτα) and αἰῶνια';[107] the same opposition between πρόσκαιρος and αἰώνιος is a recurrent theme in the New Testament which will be developed by Origen.[108] In addition, from the passage above emerges the significance of the concepts of inheritance/possession and incorruptibility, which recur in *J & A* and are related to the motif of αἰών.

From a literary-stylistic point of view, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον represents a standard mode of rendering its equivalent Hebrew words in the religious translation.

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[106] Ramelli in Ramelli-Konstan (2007) 127.
[107] *J & A*, 12.12.
[108] Ramelli-Konstan (2007) 88.

The phrase is loaded with the philosophical-religious senses and allegorical significance which were conceived at the time of the novel's composition and throughout the centuries of its transmission. The recurrent feature allows us to challenge the conventional definition of *J & A* as a novel, while supporting its reading as a biblical commentary and religious text.[109] According to Burchard, the language of *J & A* is 'a simple Greek *koinè* with a marked Hebrew and/or Aramaic flavour… Most of these phenomena, as well as the author's vocabulary and phraseology generally, can be paralleled from the Septuagint'.[110] In this connection, the term αἰών and its cognate forms assume typical values that can be ascribed to the relevant passages of the Hebrew Bible, thus being a faithful rendering of religious concepts.

In her study of the meanings of αἰών in Greek literature and philosophy, from Homer to Plato, the Septuagint and Philo of Alexandria, Helena Maria Keizer has also demonstrated that the books of the Hellenistic Bible render the Hebrew/Aramaic original text so that they 'show an invariable pattern: they use the Greek word *aiōn* as a standard equivalent of the Hebrew word *'olām* (and Aramaic *'ālam*)'. In the Septuagint *'aiōn* is a 'stereotyped rendering of *'olām*, -'stereotyping being a common phenomenon in LXX translation'- (…) 'a stereotyped Greek rendering of a Hebrew word is a symbol representing the Hebrew word rather than an ordinary Greek word with a Greek meaning'.[111] As Burchard remarks, the expression εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον appears to be a leading motif in *J & A*.[112] It constitutes a variant form of the clause εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, the most frequent use of αἰών in the Septuagint, which is attested in pagan Greek literature only after the time of the Hellenistic translation of Jewish Scripture itself.[113] On the narrative level, the sacred marriage between the

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[109] *J & A* has been recently defined as an example of 'rewritten Bible', rather than a novelistic story. The category of 'rewritten Bible' is however 'meta-generic' that is, it can be applied to different literary genres other than the novel in antiquity; see Braginskaya (2005-2007).
[110] Burchard (1985) 185.
[111] Keizer (1999) 114.
[112] Burchard (1985) 207, note r to chapter 4.10: 'JosAs is fond of it'.
[113] See Keizer (1999) 122 and cf. Ramelli-Konstan (2007) 50-51 for the cases of Diodorus Siculus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Keizer (1999) 169: Keizer pointed out that the expression is 'remarkably frequent in the pseudepigraphical work *Joseph and Aseneth*', which she dated 'probably in the first half of the second century A.D.' Keizer did not analyze the occurrences of εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον in the novel.

patriarch Joseph and the daughter of the priest of Heliopolis is presented as indissoluble and long-lasting, projected in the sphere of eternity. In the novelistic context, the expression indicates that so absolute an aim transcends the blissful solution of intricate vicissitudes in a fairy-tale-like novella.

At the beginning of the events narrated in *J & A* Pentephres conceives the thought of seeing his daughter, Aseneth, becoming Joseph's wife.[114] The expression indicating a long-lasting bond adds solemnity to the sacred marriage of Joseph and Aseneth, which is envisioned by a pagan priest as an extraordinary event.

> Come, my child, and I will hand you over to him for (his) wife (εἰς γυναῖκα), and you will be a bride (νύμφη) (to him), and he will be your bridegroom (νυμφίος) forever and ever (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον).[115]

After her angry speech, Aseneth hastens to her penthouse. However, as soon as she can see Joseph entering Heliopolis on his golden chariot, she experiences an instant change of mind. The scene contains details of Aseneth's physical reactions to the emotions that seize her, while she pronounces her monologue of repentance, concluding it with the hope to become Joseph's maidservant 'forever'. The notion of service to a master 'for a lifetime' is typical of Jewish normative passages in Scripture; therefore, Aseneth expresses a Jewish ethical point of view 'between the lines'.

> And now, let my father give me to Joseph for a maidservant and slave (εἰς παιδίσκην καὶ εἰς δούλην), and I will serve him (*sc.* Joseph, δουλεύσω αὐτῷ) forever and ever (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον).[116]

The reiteration of the phrase in Aseneth's soliloquy mirrors Pentephres' speech, indicating the parallels built into the macro-structure of the narrative. In addition, the relevant passages exemplify the intertextuality of *J & A*, which is obtained revisiting both Jewish and Hellenic literary antecedents to make them significant in a different cultural environment. For instance, the characters seem to exist, act and speak in the domain of the ancient novel, although the imagery and biblical references reveal a

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[114] Inowlocki (2002) 13.
[115] *J & A*, 4.10. Unless otherwise specified, the English translation by Burchard is followed (1985) and, for the Greek text, both Philonenko (1968) and Burchard (1996) whenever the texts are different.
[116] *J & A*, 6.8.

Jewish-Christian religious perspective.[117] Indeed, the theme of the metaphorical service to the beloved one is a *topos* of Classical-Hellenistic erotic literature.[118] The ode which Aseneth pronounces in her heart ends with her proposal to serve Joseph for an extensive time: 'And I will make his bed, and wash his feet, and wait on him, and be a slave for him and serve him forever and ever',

… καὶ διακονήσω αὐτῷ
καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ δούλη καὶ δουλεύσω αὐτῷ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον.[119]

At the same time, the expression echoes a biblical image, referring to Jewish tradition and thus signifying the original Jewish outlook of *J & A*. In the Hebrew Bible, voluntary enslavement is related to an indefinite future time.[120] Keizer quotes biblical passages that employ the word-concept αἰών in the sense of 'the whole life'.[121] The story of young Samuel's offering to the Lord is most significant: Hannah, beloved by her husband but barren, calls upon God that she may give birth to a child, and 'she will bring her little son, Samuel, to the house of the Lord, in order that he will stay there always, (LXX: ἕως αἰῶνος), that is: all the days that he lives he shall be given over to the Lord.'[122] In fact, αἰών and the adjective αἰώνιος can express continuity of time, in this case within the boundaries of a human life, rather than in eternity. On the contrary divine punishment, retribution and the evil opposed to God are often presented as limited in time in biblical texts, only lasting for certain

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[117] *J & A* has been defined, in traditional scholarship, as the most Greek, or Hellenistic-Egyptian, of the 'Jewish novellas'; cf. e. g. Philonenko (1974) 76: '*Joseph et Aséneth* est le plus égyptien des romans grecs'; West (1976) 75: 'It seems perfectly natural to describe JA as a romance…', and 78: '… but the basic narrative is indisputably Jewish'. Inowlocki challenges the common opinion reversing the perspective: 'L'opinion selon laquelle le *Roman d'Aséneth* est le plus grec des romans juifs merite d'être réexaminée: ne s'agirait-il pas plutôt du plus juif des romans grecs?' See Inowlocki (2002) 9.

[118] See Burchard (1985) 210 n. t to *J & A*, 6.8: 'Voluntary enslavement of course is also a motif of erotic language'.

[119] *J & A*, 13.15.

[120] A special legislation in the Torah allowed a Hebrew servant to be free after six years, but on account of his right to live with his wife and children, if they were still property of his master, the servant could choose to attend upon his master literally 'forever' that is, until the end of his life, as it was written in the Law: 'and he will serve him for life' (LXX: [δουλεύσει] εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα): *Ex.*, 21.6; and parallel passage in *Deut.*, 15.17: 'servant for life', LXX: [οἰκέτης] εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα; see Keizer (1999) 130. The time indicator εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα thus expresses the entirety of a lifetime within its limits.

[121] In the first book of Samuel the Philistine king Achish says to himself about David: 'he will be my servant forever', (LXX: δοῦλος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα). *1Sam.*, 27.12, and cf. *Lev.*, 25.46: 'slaves for life', κατόχιμοι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

[122] *1Sam.*, 1.21; 1.28 in Keizer (1999) 130.

αἰῶνες, destined to come to an end.[123] However the 'terms for eternity' add religious significance to Aseneth's confession and prayer when she envisions her own destruction in the eschatological time:

> …and the big sea monster which (exists) since eternity will swallow me, and I will be destroyed for ever (and) ever.[124]

While Aseneth pleads the Lord to rescue her forever from the symbolic Leviathan, which exists from time immemorial, her prosperous future is reiterated both in the positive requests of her confession and in the confirmatory announcement of the heavenly visitor. The imagery of the sea-monster and the abyss give to the passage of *J & A* the tone of a legend or a folk-tale. It is in fact noteworthy that in the book of *Job* the notion of a service forever is ironically linked to the figure of the leviathan. God asks the hero Job a rhetorical question that is, if the ancestral monster will make an agreement with him, so that Job will have the leviathan as his servant forever.[125] God's ironical question to His faithful servant Job implies a negative answer; similarly, in the novel Aseneth will not be lost, because her destiny is to find a shelter in eternity, becoming in her turn a safe haven for all worthy human-beings.

Aseneth receives from the divine envoy the name of City of Refuge, while she can learn, with the reader, the significance of hypostasized Repentance (μετάνοια) in the transcendent divine world. Repentance is the daughter of the Most High, Whom she invokes all the time (πᾶσαν ὥραν… καὶ πᾶσαν ὥραν) both for Aseneth and for all who repent. God the Most High has prepared for all those who revere her 'a nuptial chamber in the heavens, and she will serve them forever and ever', τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτὴν ἡτοίμασε <u>νυμφῶνα οὐράνιον</u>, καὶ αὕτη διακονήσει αὐτοῖς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον.[126] Similarly the seven maidens at Aseneth's

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[123] Ramelli in Ramelli-Konstan (2007) 48-49. This concept of limited punishment is important to understand Origen's doctrine of apocatastasis that is, the belief that all human beings will be saved and evil abolished after resurrection and the final judgement. Cf. Ramelli (2007) 116-117.

[124] *J & A*, 12.11: καὶ καταπίεταί με τὸ κῆτος τὸ μέγα τὸ ἀπ' αἰῶνος, καὶ ἀπολοῦμαι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον.

[125] *Job*., 40.28.

[126] *J & A*, 15.7, Philonenko (1968) 184. Texts vary in this passage; in the *OTP* Burchard (1985) translated *J & A*, 15.7: 'And she (Repentance) herself is guardian of all virgins, and loves you very much, and is beseeching the Most High for you at all times and for all who repent she prepared a place of rest in the heavens. And she will renew all who repent, and wait on them herself for ever (and)

service, who were born on the same day as her and were beautiful as stars, thus being imagined in a heavenly dimension, are blessed by the man from heaven with these words: 'God the Most High will bless you forever and ever, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον'.[127] These lines seem to convey explicitly a theoretical outlook in *J & A*: here the dimensions of a transcendent time and space are joined in order to illustrate in mystical imagery the prosperous future for Jewish-Christian history. In this ideological context, the 'nuptial chamber in heaven' stands for the mystical marriage of Joseph and Aseneth that transcends scriptural accuracy to assume a universal religious value; likewise, the seven maidens at Aseneth's service may constitute allegorical personifications of supernatural beings, symbolic epochs and the entourage of Wisdom, in a blending of various cultural systems such as Egyptian myth and Jewish figurative mysticism.

The imagery of creation in *J & A* signifies Aseneth's inner transformation or change of heart, while divine creation of the world is evoked by Joseph when he announces his departure and return to Heliopolis in a week's time, on the eighth day from 'today'.[128] Human lives are therefore related to the divine in the spiritual dimension of αἰών. The honeycomb that comes into being as the outcome of the man from heaven's words is an image of the creative power conveyed by the divine word itself.[129] In his prayer of blessing for Aseneth Joseph asks the God of his father Israel that she may enter the elected people's place of rest and obtain eternal life: καὶ ζησάτω ἐν τῇ αἰωνίῳ ζωῇ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον.[130] In the same sentence are associated the idea of life in a spiritual dimension as opposed to death and the concept of an extended time in the world beyond. Significantly, Aseneth's 'secret

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ever'. In the text studied by Burchard, the 'nuptial chamber' is not mentioned as far as this passage is concerned, being substituted by the 'place of rest', τόπον ἀναπαύσεως, which is in the heavens.

[127] *J & A*, 17.5. The text of the longer version, published by Burchard, contains more symbolic elements: 'And you (*sc.* the seven maidens) shall be the seven pillars of the City of Refuge, and all the fellow inhabitants of the chosen of that city will rest upon you forever and ever'; cf. Burchard (1985) 231.

[128] *J & A*, 9.5.

[129] *J & A*, 16.11.

[130] *J & A*, 8.9; the combination of terms 'life' and 'eternal time', 'forever and ever', is another recurring feature of the Septuagint; we can read this verse of Joseph's prayer in Burchard's editions, cf. Burchard (1985) 213 and Burchard (1996) 171. Philonenko (1968) omitted the passage because he followed the '*d* texts', which contain the short version of the romance; in the relevant passage of his edition, only the 'place of rest' is mentioned: καὶ εἰσελθάτο εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσίν σου.

prayer' conveys a parallel image. Her invocation to God opens with the attributes 'Lord, God of the ages, who created all things…'[131] The designation of God as κύριε ὁ θεὸς τῶν αἰώνων signifies that the God of Joseph and Israel exists from ages immemorial, ruling the course of history throughout successive times in the dimensions of the past, the present and the future. The characters in the novel exist in this mystical dimension. In fact the man from heaven, after his explanation of the divine mysteries and the role of Repentance for an unlimited continuous time, promises Aseneth to inform Joseph soon about her new condition as 'a bride (νύμφη) for him for-ever/the time to come': Καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀπέρχομαι πρὸς Ἰωσὴφ καὶ λαλήσω αὐτῷ περὶ σοῦ πάντα τὰ ῥήματά μου· καὶ ἐλεύσεται πρός σε Ἰωσὴφ σήμερον καὶ ὄψεταί σε καὶ χαρήσεται ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ ἀγαπήσει σε καὶ ἔσται σου νυμφίος καὶ σὺ ἔσῃ αὐτῷ νύμφη εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον.[132] The curious image of Aseneth's wedding dress in the heavenly messenger's following exhortation that she wears 'the ancient and first robe which is laid up in your chamber from the beginning (ἐν τῷ θαλάμῳ σου ἀπ' ἀρχῆς…)' highlights her status as Joseph's rightful bride.[133] The chronological indicator referring to immemorial time is obviously not realistic but hints at the necessity of the divine plan, thus conveying a religious tenet. In fact, as Gerard Delling pointed out in a study of the linguistic relation of the Septuagint to *J & A*, the construction ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος reminds us that Aseneth was betrothed to Joseph from the beginning of time and forever or 'from now to eternity'.[134]

It is now worthwhile to turn to the concept of σήμερον as a term for eternity cognate to αἰών. By way of example, when Joseph returns to Heliopolis to find a

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[131]*J & A*, 12.1, transl. Burchard (1985) and cf. Burchard (1996) 177.
[132]*J & A*, 15. 9; cf. 15.6-7.
[133]*J & A*, 15.10. The temporal expression ἀπ' ἀρχῆς can only be found in the long text edited by Burchard and Uta Barbara Fink. In Philonenko's edition, however, the interesting image of the 'heavenly nuptial chamber', νυμφῶνα οὐράνιον, may be seen in connection with Aseneth's nuptial chamber, although the latter is rendered with the different term θάλαμος.
[134]Delling (1978) 32: cf. *J & A*, 21.3; similarly, in the apocryphal book of *Tobit*, Sarah is destined to Tobias ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος, according to the events determined by God; the expression recurs, e. g., in *Tob*, 6.18 BA; 8. 21 S.

beautifully transformed Aseneth, he is amazed and unable to recognize her. Aseneth introduces herself with these words:

> I am your maidservant Aseneth, and all the idols I have thrown away from me and they were destroyed. And a man came to me from heaven today (σήμερον), and gave me bread of life and I ate, and a cup of blessing and I drank. And he said to me, I have given you for a bride to Joseph today (σήμερον), and he himself will be your bridegroom for ever (and) ever, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον (...) Your name will no longer be called Aseneth, but your name will be called City of Refuge and the Lord God will reign as king over many nations for ever... (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας).[135]

Indeed the time-indicator σήμερον, 'today', expresses a concept equivalent to eternity. If we explore Philo of Alexandria's use of terms related to the concept of αἰών we can find interesting parallels with *J & A*. Philo's exegesis of Scripture reflects his knowledge of both the Septuagint and classical Greek philosophy, in particular Platonism and Stoicism. Ilaria Ramelli has noted that 'occurrences of αἰώνιος in Philo commonly bear the sense "lasting", or "continual"'[136]; in line with both Hellenic-philosophical and biblical usage, Philo tends to make a distinction between the more versatile term αἰώνιος and ἀΐδιος, which signifies 'eternal' in the strict sense. In the allegorical interpretation of the Law Philo conveys an explanation to the term σήμερον, which is connected to the concept of αἰών: '... in the wise man passions are defeated, 'even to this day' that is, always. For the whole age of the world is made commensurate with to-day, for the daily cycle is the measure of all time'.[137] Philo's exegesis may be adapted to explain the value of 'today' in *J & A*. As already noted, Joseph arrives 'today' to Heliopolis, and returns after one week in the same chronological dimension; Aseneth's transformation and the marriage of the protagonists also happen in another 'today'. The symbolic 'today' and the week of Aseneth's confession illustrate divine creation in the sphere of eternity or a timeless continuity.

In addition, Joseph embodies the temporal dimension of eternity in line with the allegorical Jewish tradition. At this point, Philo's model is useful to propose an

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[135] *J & A*, 19.5.
[136] Ramelli (2007) 51.
[137] *Leg. All.*, 3.25-26.

interpretation of the novel. In fact, by relating the cosmological and moral sphere, Philo exposes the significance of mastering passions with the concept of αἰών as all the ages of the world in their entirety. In the following section, Joseph's grave at Shechem is interpreted as a figure of the material dimension, of the body and sense-perception: 'For this reason too Jacob gives as a special portion to Joseph Shechem, the things of the body and of the senses, as he is occupied in toiling at these things…'[138] In the same passage Joseph is contrasted to his brother Judah, the patriarch able to acknowledge God openly; to Judah the Most High 'gives not presents, but praise and hymns and hallowed songs from his brethren'. However, Joseph's unique, ambivalent nature is revealed: Philo remarks that whereas 'it is not possible that he whose abode is in the body and the mortal race should attain to being with God'… 'this is possible only for him whom God rescues out of the prison' that is, Joseph.[139] In the account of Genesis Shechem is linked to pagan cults: it is the place where Jacob buried idols and jewels, alien to the true faith. In Philo's allegorical interpretation, the idols 'are alien to the soul, the gods moulded in metal, the making of which Moses has forbidden; and these are a means of dissolving virtue and well-being, and a means of forming and giving fixity to wickedness and passions…'[140] Thus Shechem becomes the place where passions are 'always hidden away and placed under guard', as the etymological value of the toponym suggests, being 'shoulder' or 'toil', for the man pursuing pleasures will strive to keep them well-protected.[141]

Beyond the question of the significance of αἰών in these phrases that is, if the formula indicates eternity in the eschatological time rather than the historical time of generation(s) on earth, it is feasible to propose an interpretation of the novel of *J & A* in the light of Philo's allegorical exegesis. Indeed, as we have seen from Philo's complex and multifaceted portrayal of Joseph, the Patriarch is worthy of commemoration for the virtue of repentance, which towards the end of his life made him convert from vanity and passions to his belonging to God.

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[138] *Leg. All.* 3.26.
[139] *Leg. All.* 3.42.
[140] *Leg. All.* 3.22.
[141] *Leg. All.* 3.25.

> I (…) will not fail to praise him for his repentance. And with good reason too, since Moses the revealer preserves from destruction the story of his repentance, so worthy of love and remembrance, under the symbol of the bones which he held should not be suffered to remain buried forever in Egypt. For he deemed it a grievous shame to suffer any fair blossom of the soul to be withered or flooded and drowned by the streams which the Egyptian river of passion, the body, pours fourth unceasingly through the channel of all the senses.[142]

Joseph's bones, which are brought from Egypt to Shechem[143], are interpreted by the Jewish philosopher as the touching symbol of the hero's repentance, 'worthy of love and remembrance' (ἀξιέραστον καὶ ἀξιομνημόνευτον). Thus, in opposition with the idols and tokens of pagan worship, Joseph's bones represent the seeds for new ethical-religious fruits, the 'fair blossom of the soul' (εἴ τι ἤνθησεν ἡ ψυχὴ καλόν). In this connection, the novel of *J & A* makes Joseph an unchangeable model of virtue, while attributing to Aseneth initially traits of uncontrolled passions and the worship of idols, which she rejects and destroys, together with her costly foods and jewels. Consequently, in *J & A* the virtue of repentance is experienced and embodied by Aseneth rather than by Joseph as in Philo's allegorical writings. In the novel, figurative imagery supports this allegorical interpretation: Aseneth is described as a blessed field of the Most High, while her bones will flourish and she will know no old age or corruption:

> ἰδοὺ νῦν ἔφαγες ἄρτον ζωῆς καὶ ἔπιες ποτήριον ἀθανασίας καὶ κέχρισαι χρίσματι ἀφθαρσίας. ἰδοὺ δὴ ἀπὸ τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας αἱ σάρκες σου βρύουσιν ὡς ἄνθη ζωῆς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς τοῦ ὑψίστου καὶ τὰ ὀστᾶ σου πιανθήσονται ὡς αἱ κέρδοι τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς τοῦ θεοῦ· καὶ δυνάμεις ἀκάματοι περισχήσουσί σε καὶ ἡ νεότης σου γῆρας οὐκ ὄψεται καὶ τὸ κάλλος σου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα οὐκ ἐκλείψει.[144]

It is noteworthy that Aseneth's eternal youth after her mystical transformation conveys in figurative terms the concept of αἰών as opposed to the transitory goods on earth and the inevitable destruction of things material, as pointed out at the beginning of this survey. Thus, the vivid imagery of the novel contains underlying

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[142] *Som.* 2.109.
[143] *Ex.* 13.19.
[144] *J & A*, 16.16.

allegorical interpretation of the biblical text, which points to a relation between *J & A* and the Jewish-Christian exegesis of Scripture.

2.3.1 Aseneth among the Ancestors of Israel.

The concept of Aiōn connotes the covenant between God and His people, which was established with Noah after the Flood and sealed with the rainbow. The covenant is defined διαθήκη αἰώνιος, lasting forever because it will be handed down to human generations (εἰς γενεὰς αἰωνίους).[145] This is the way human beings can live eternally. Two types of covenants can be identified in the Old Testament, the 'obligatory covenant', which was established with Moses on Mount Sinai, and the 'promissory covenant', 'which God granted to the forefathers of the Israelite people', that is the foundation of the covenant that will last forever.[146] In Scripture, patriarchal stories illustrate generations at the origins of Israel; patriarchal names in Hellenistic biblical exegesis recall symbolically Israel's ancient lore. In fact, Abraham was called by God to be the founder of Israel, receiving the promise of a blessed offspring in the land of Canaan.[147] The three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, are named as the representatives of God and the Law: 'God also said to Moses: Say to the Israelites: the Lord (*YHWH*), the God (*'Elohim*) of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name for ever (αἰώνιον), the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation (γενεῶν γενεαῖς)'.[148] In the treatise *On Moses* Philo of Alexandria makes explicit the connection between the Patriarchs and Israel's ancient lore. When Moses asks the divine voice His name as a token of the truthful announcement he has to pass down to his people, God replies reminding him of the three Patriarchs, archetypes of the original Wisdom and the Law: '… tell them not only that I am God, but also the God of the three men whose names express their virtue, each of them exemplar (κανών) of the wisdom they have gained, Abraham

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[145] Cf. *gen.*, 9.12-16 in Keizer (1999) 124-125.
[146] Freedman-Miano (2003) in Porter-de Roo, 7-26 and cf. review by Nitzan (2005) 366-367.
[147] *Gen.*, 12-13.
[148] *Ex.*, 3. 14-15; transl. by Keizer (1999) 129.

by teaching, Isaac by nature, Jacob by practice.'[149] In Philo's exegesis the Patriarchs guarantee for the true sense of the word of God.

In this cultural framework, women play a special role. Indeed, Old Testament episodes represent birth narratives as the seal of the Covenant between God and the elected people through the intermediation of the women of Israel. These narratives follow a recurrent scheme with variations, including the direct intervention of God or His emissaries, the angels, the former condition of the woman in question as barren, like Rachel and Hannah, Samuel's mother, late in age, like Sarah, or maiden, like Mary mother of Jesus in the Gospels, and the astonishment, distrust or protest of the woman in front of the divine announcement.[150] R. H. Jarrel has demonstrated with a detailed exploration of birth narratives in the Bible that the mothers of Israel become protagonists, from the Patriarchs' wives to Mary in the New Testament.[151] In the story of Rachel, Joseph's mother, divine intervention is only implied in the significance underlying the narrative. Rachel was loved by Jacob but she could not have children for a long time. When she complained about her condition, Jacob reminded her that only God had the power to grant her children. When her first son, Joseph, was born, Rachel prayed to the Lord to 'add another son', who will be, in fact, Benjamin.[152]

In this interpretation, it is feasible to consider Aseneth as Joseph's counterpart in the Covenant with God that is renewed in the land of Egypt. Her role as mother of Jewish generations is foreshadowed in her first portrayal, when she is compared to the Patriarchs' wives, and confirmed in the encounter scene with the heavenly emissary. Aseneth's initial complaint to Pentephres' proposal that she marries Joseph might be read as a rhetorical protest to the divine plan, which is conventional in biblical annunciation scenes. The episode is however featured in novelistic terms, as

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[149] *Mos.*, 1.76.

[150] E. g. Sarah (*Gen.* 18), Samson's mother (*Judg.* 13), Elizabeth (*Luke* 1) are cases of barren and late in age women visited by an angel; Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, receives help from a divine emissary in the wilderness (*Gen.* 16), while Mary is informed about Jesus' birth by an angel (*Luke* 1. 26).

[151] Jarrel (2002).

[152] *Gen.*, 30.23-24. In the LXX we read: Καὶ ἐκάλεσε τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰωσὴφ, λέγουσα, προσθέτω ὁ Θεός μοι υἱὸν ἕτερον. Thus, in the account of Genesis Joseph's name is interpreted as 'addition', being symbolically related to the extraordinary circumstances of his birth, as often applied in ancient legends to heroes and important characters. For the episode of Benjamin's birth and the choice of his name, compare *Gen.*, 35.17-18.

if the heroine of a Greek novel challenged her father's authority.[153] This shows the complex literary devices of the novel, a text that moves between different cultural systems. In fact, Aseneth at the beginning of the story is a proud maiden despising all men, thus possibly representing the pagan world through the literary code of the erotic novel. The content of her speech is however connoted with biblical symbols in Jewish perspective. In fact her contempt for Joseph, in her initial conception a stranger of dubious origins and ethical behaviour, is expressed through the epithet 'the son of the shepherd of Canaan', in which the reference to Canaan might signify a negative commonplace in Jewish interpretation of Scripture.

> Why does my lord and my father speak such words as these, to hand me over, like a captive, to a man (who is) an alien, and a fugitive, and (was) sold (as a slave)? Is he not the shepherd's son from the land of Canaan, and he himself was caught… when he was sleeping with his mistress and his master threw him into the prison of darkness; and Pharaoh brought him out of prison, because he interpreted his dream just like the older women of the Egyptians?[154]

On the level of romantic fiction the passage creates an intriguing obstacle to the foreshadowed happy marriage of Joseph and Aseneth, delaying the accomplishment of the plot and thus producing an effect of suspense. In addition, it is relevant to the general interpretation of the novel, its purposes and intended audience. Indeed, Aseneth's hostile point of view about Joseph and his ancestors is in line with anti-Jewish traditions. Behaving like an Egyptian woman despite her ethical credentials, Aseneth might represent the point of view of a pagan denigrator. Therefore she has to speak out of ignorance, being unaware of the truthful story of Israel, the sacred precepts of its ancient lore and the heritage of its chosen people. The above passage points to a possible apologetic purpose of the story, aiming to counteract the criticism moved against Jewish religion and customs by the pagan educated world.[155]

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[153]See Egger (1989) 108-135, for an excellent survey of roles and destinies of the heroines of the Greek novels; Inowlocki (2004).
[154]*J & A*, 4.9-11.
[155]See, for instance, an interesting passage in Juvenal, *Sat.* VI, with the figure of a begging Jewess, presented as an 'interpreter of the laws of Jerusalem', 'high priestess of a tree' and 'decoder of dreams'; these verses are quoted by Rajak (1992) to exemplify a pagan educated point of view, albeit

Thus, Aseneth might undertake the role of a foil, acting as an Egyptian/pagan persona in order to highlight, in the course of the story, Joseph's high ethical and spiritual qualities, while she was seen as a Jewish heroine in the hypothetical Hellenistic milieu of provenance and diffusion of the novel. In addition, the negative reference to Canaan in her speech might indicate Aseneth's Jewish identity. Indeed, Scripture and Second Temple literature present the land of Canaan alongside with Egypt as hostile to the nation of Israel; Egyptians and Canaanites are enemies accursed from ancient times, punished but eventually restored to their place by God.[156] Aseneth is introduced as the daughter of the Egyptian priest of Heliopolis in the novel of *J & A* while according to the Jewish traditional law and rabbinic narratives her descent from Ham and Canaan constituted a more serious obstacle to her marriage with Joseph.[157]

The anonymous author(s) of *J & A*, learned in Greek Scripture as well as in Hellenic culture, might have represented Aseneth like a woman of Israel, in order to signify the worthiness of a long-lasting covenant with God in Egypt and possibly in other lands of the Diaspora. Indeed, her assimilation with Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel, wives of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, points to Aseneth's role as a mother of Israel. Perhaps *J & A* was not concerned with Aseneth's ethnic origins, in line with Jewish-Hellenistic culture. In fact, the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint mention Aseneth in passing and suspend any ethical judgement. Even the sharp Hellenistic exegete Philo of Alexandria accepts as a matter of fact that Joseph married the daughter of the priest of Heliopolis: there was apparently no need to comment upon Joseph's Egyptian marriage. However, Philo was the first Jewish exegete known to us to modify biblical stories that represent foreign mothers of Hebrew ancestors, applying to Scripture contemporary questions of ethnicity and Jewish identity. Even so, Philo recorded Aseneth's Egyptian origins while apparently disregarding her conversion which the novel of *J & A* invents as an original story.

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expressed in literary form, on the presence and activity of the Jewish sages under the Roman government.

[156]Chessnutt (2003) 231-232: in *Wisdom of Solomon*, literary work of the Second Temple Period, the universal love and mercy of God are directed towards Egyptians and Canaanites, traditional enemies of Israel, and assumed as supreme ethical models of human behaviour.

[157]Aptowitzer (1924) 239-243: in a long, detailed footnote, Aptowitzer discusses the question of Noah's curse of Canaan and his descendants, originated in *Gen*., 9.25-27.

Once again, allegory plays a significant role in Philo's reconstruction of Jewish history. In fact, Ephraim and Manasseh are interpreted by the Alexandrian philosopher as allegorical symbols of memory and forgetting rather than as historical characters.[158] In much the same way, the story of *J & A* can be read as an allegorical novel that expands the tale of Joseph's successful career in Egypt, going further the hero's prestigious role as chief-administrator of the kingdom and making him a just sovereign in Egypt until the Pharaoh's legitimate heir is ready to ascend the throne. The conclusion of the novel is likely to indicate that ethnic-cultural barriers do not represent real obstacles and can be crossed.

2.4 *J & A* between Gnostic Mysticism and Pagan Allegory.

Within the category of 'mystical novel', Philonenko identified the 'Gnostic drama' as one of the possible literary contexts of *J & A*. Indeed, *J & A* might be witness to a complex and multi-cultural religious milieu where the canons of orthodoxy had not been established yet. Thus, the biblical Joseph story can be rewritten in *J & A* with features of an erotic novel in order to convey principles shared in the Gnostic doctrine, such as the belief in a twofold reality, an ideal world of the light and spirit as opposed to the inferior plane of matter. If the novel contains elements of Gnostic mysticism, these are concealed 'between the lines' of the narrative. By way of example, the theme of divine Creation is mentioned in *J & A*, hinting at the symbolic time that commemorates the event of Joseph's arrival in Heliopolis, the week of Aseneth's confession and Joseph's absence and return to the city,[159] as well as adding figurative *realia* that is, the ashes blended with Aseneth's tears to form a mud, which seem to illustrate the arising of life from the chaotic matter.[160] The Gnostic *Apocryphon of John* or *Secret Revelation of John* contains underlying senses as well

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[158]Ephraim is, in Philo's words, 'figurative name of memory' meaning 'fruit-bearing', for the soul's proper fruit is to retain what it learns, and he is therefore superior to Manasseh, figure of 'recollection'; see e.g. *leg. All.*, 3.90-93, *Sob.*, 27, *mig.,* 205, *congr.*, 40, *mut.*, 97. On this subject, cf. Niehoff (1999) 52-53.

[159] *J & A*, 9.5: καὶ εἶπεν Ἰωσήφ· οὐχὶ ἀλλ' ἀπελεύσομαι σήμερον διότι αὕτη ἡ ἡμέρα ἐστὶν ἐν ᾗ ἤρξατο ὁ θεὸς ποιεῖν πάντα τὰ κτίσματα αὐτοῦ καὶ τῇ ἡμέρα τῇ ὀγδόῃ ὅταν ἐπαναστραφῇ ἡ ἡμέρα αὕτη ἐπαναστρέψω κἀγὼ πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ αὐλισθήσομαι ἐνθάδε.

[160] *J & A*, 10.16: καὶ ἀνέστε Ἀσενὲθ τὸ πρωΐ καὶ εἶδε καὶ ἰδοὺ πηλὸς πολὺς ἐκ τῶν δακρύων αὐτῆς καὶ ἐκ τῆς τέφρας εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος.

as plenty of fiction. According to Gnostic myths, divine creation of the world implemented the distinction between the spiritual realm of being and the material sphere of becoming. Against this background, the divine word (λόγος) is powerful because in it is contained the spirit of life that made creation possible and that informs all living beings. Thus the *Apocryphon of John* purports to retell the 'true story' of divine Creation of the cosmos, of the first human beings, Adam, Eve, Seth, Cain and Abel, the spiritual beings and the sacred covenant between Noah and God. The first-person narrator of the pseudepigraphon repeats that events were 'not as Moses said' and indeed he is reporting the faithful account. As I have already highlighted in passing, Régine Charron has detected important parallels between the 'Hymn of Pronoia' at the conclusion of the Nag Hammadi codex II[161] and the philosophical dialogue between Cleopatra the alchemist and the philosophers. Further points of contact with *J & A* consist in images pregnant with deeper significance. These points of contact may be relevant to envision the origins of *J & A* from a religious environment at the boundaries of Judaism and Christianity, as well as to the rich reception of the novel. Later reception however marks different patterns for the *Apocryphon of John* and *J & A*.

In fact, John's secret revelation, which conveys a mythical version of Genesis, alternative to the canonical book, was perceived as dangerous in the fifth century A.D., when the Church in Egypt was shaping an orthodox doctrine; its manuscripts were preserved thanks to Coenobite monks who preserved the scrolls. Originally composed in Greek, the extant *Apocryphon of John* is preserved in Coptic, the language of the Egyptian Christian Church. The afterlife of *J & A* can be appreciated as almost the opposite: if the novel was originally composed in a Jewish-Greek-speaking milieu of Egypt, its manuscripts continued to be copied in Greek until the tradition reached for instance the monasteries of Mount Athos, being translated in Modern Greek and illuminated like an edifying hagiography;[162] the earliest version of

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[161] Four copies of the *Secret Revelation of John* have survived, representing a shorter and a longer version; the longer version is preserved in Nag Hammadi codices II and IV, while the shorter version is contained in the Berlin Codex (BC) and the Nag Hammadi Codex III, which present more important variant readings. See King (2006) 25.

[162] See e.g. MS 671, Roe 5 (year 1614), which is preserved at the Bodleian Library in Oxford; G 162, formerly the McKell manuscript, part of a private collection in Virginia Beach, and the Mount Athos MS 661, in the Koutloumousi monastery. Studies about these MSS and their illuminations can be

Aseneth's story is the Syriac 'Book of Asyath' of the sixth century A.D., which testifies to its favourable Christian reception. Thus, if *J & A* contained elements of Gnosis, these were concealed skilfully under the narrative surface of the love and adventure story. Indeed, the romanticized Joseph story, which privileges the encounter and marriage of the protagonists as well as their symbolic family relations, can be read as allegorical discourse which conveys an original religious doctrine. Indeed, the veil of allegory might have concealed the potentially controversial beliefs conveyed in *J & A*, so that the novel could be handed down in different environments as a significant, useful and enjoyable religious text.

First, it is possible to infer from the plan of the *Apocryphon of John* analogies with the announcement scene of *J & A*. At the outset of the apocryphon, the heading describes the content of the work as a 'revelation of mysteries, [and the] things hidden in silence', which correspond to the 'ineffable mysteries' disclosed to Aseneth. In the framework of the secret revelation, after John has heard bitter criticism about his faith in Jesus' teaching from an orthodox Jew, Arimanius the Pharisee, he withdraws to a desert place, grieving and longing to know the truth about the origins and destiny of humanity.[163] A vision appears to him, which is anticipated by the breaking of heavens, the light reverberating on the whole creation and a shaking like an earthquake. On the eighth day, after the week of her grieving and confession, Aseneth witnesses similar phenomena: next to the morning star, the sky is torn apart, and a sudden, unbearable light appears.[164] The 'man from heaven' is a figure emanating light like a fire or lightening, and he is 'in every respect similar to Joseph' that is, he bears Joseph's symbolic attributes.[165] Another divine envoy appears to John in the apocryphon, at first as a youth, then as a young man and eventually as a servant. Possible links to this figure may be seen in the roles which characters undertake in *J & A*. For instance, while the 'man from heaven' fascinates

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found in Pächt, Jeanne and O. (1954), Vikan (1976), Burchard (2003) 2-7; 359-365, Pelekanides, Stylianos (1974).

[163] Cf. Dawson (1992) 176-177: while representing a link between early Judaism, Jewish Christianity and later Valentinian revisionism, the secret revelation of John was probably the work of Jewish Gnostic intellectuals, which criticized the traditional account of Creation in Genesis; when the text was handed down by Christians, its most explicit Jewish elements must have been revised and even removed.

[164] *J & A*, 14.2.

[165] *J & A*, 14.9.

Aseneth as if he were Joseph's heavenly double, the old patriarch Jacob in the novel is also instructing the protagonists with memorable words and his striking portrayal associates Jacob-Israel to an angel or a divine being. Moreover, the motif of the service to Joseph, the 'son of God', which Aseneth wishes to undertake forever, has already been analysed in the present work as a hint at the eschatological dimension, which is sketched through the metaphorical image of μετάνοια in the novel.

After having explored the deeper senses of the recurring phrase εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον in *J & A* and in connection to Jewish, early-Christian and Hermetic texts, it is now fruitful to remark the chronological dimension that is prospected in the apocryphon. Indeed, the divine envoy promises to teach John 'what is [and what was] and what will come to [pass]' (2), thus embracing the entirety of time as in eternity. The highest deity is called, with Platonizing terminology, the 'Monad', which is pure Spirit of light and among its attributes it is defined as invisible, ineffable, unnameable, incorruptible and immeasurable mind (Greek νοῦς); single 'aeons' and Time are contained in this primal deity. The description of the Spirit which sees its own reflection of light in 'the spring of the water of life' or the 'spring of the [pure light]-water [which] surrounds him'[166] is strikingly similar to the scene of Aseneth asking for pure living water from the spring to wash her face: when she sees her own image reflected in the water, Aseneth realizes that she has been given a supernatural essence.[167] The 'waters of light' are also the means to awaken and rescue the dead souls in Hades in the alchemical tract of Cleopatra, as already noted. The influence of Hellenic philosophies is also resonant in the apocryphon: Plato's myth of creation in the *Timaeus* offers the relevant terminology and conceptual depth to this Gnostic version of *Genesis*, while the imagery of the soul's reflection in pure living water combines the significant wording of the Gospel and Letters of John[168]

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[166] *Apocryphon of John*, NHC II, 2: 'For it is he who looks at himself in his light which surrounds him, namely the spring of the water of life. And it is he who gives to all the aeons and in every way, (and) who gazes upon his image which he sees in the spring of the Spirit. It is he who puts his desire in his water-light which is in the spring of the pure light-water which surrounds him'. I have omitted square brackets because the sense of the content is here analysed without taking into account textual-philological issues.

[167] *J & A*, 18.8-9.

[168] Pleše (2006) esp. 93-101: John, 4.10: God the Father is remote and defined as a 'spring of living water', 'spirit' (4.24), 'life' (5.26; 6.57) and 'light' (1 John 1.5).

with the Aristotelian-Stoic theory of sense-perception (αἴσθησις) and φαντασίαι or 'impressions' coming from external objects, necessary to form ἔννοιαι or 'conceptions' that is, rational interpretations in general terms of the knowledge accumulated from experience.

In the mythical account of the *Apocryphon of John* the highest deity's first act of creation determines the coming into being of a powerful spirit, a πνεῦμα and aeōn named Barbelo. This potency is female and virgin, she comes forth from the mind of the Monad and inhabits among the aeōns that is, she partakes of eternity while glorifying continuously her spiritual father. The hypostasis of Barbelo in this Gnostic myth of creation presents analogies with personified Repentance and the heavenly virgins in the realm of the Most High God according to *J & A*. Indeed, the divine envoy explains that Repentance is 'a beautiful daughter of the Most High', Whom she invokes all the time (πᾶσαν ὥραν... καὶ πᾶσαν ὥραν) both for Aseneth and for all who repent. In the longer version of *J & A* the passage is rich of important notions. The virtue of repentance is personified as a beautiful, good and humble virgin so that while praising μετάνοια this passage of the novel also outlines the merits of virginity. Thus, both Joseph and Aseneth are introduced as virgins, this quality being the token of their moral rectitude.[169]

> Διότι ἡ μετάνοιά ἐστιν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς θυγάτηρ ὑψίστου καλὴ καὶ ἀγαθὴ σφόδρα. καὶ αὐτὴ ἐκλιπαρεῖ τὸν θεὸν τὸν ὕψιστον ὑπὲρ σοῦ πᾶσαν ὥραν καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων τῶν μετανοούντων ἐν ὀνόματι θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου ἐπειδὴ πατὴρ ἐστι τῆς μετανοίας. καὶ <αὐτὴ> ἐστιν ἐπίσκοπος πάντων τῶν παρθένων καὶ φιλεῖ ὑμᾶς σφόδρα καὶ περὶ ὑμῶν ἐρωτᾶ πᾶσαν ὥραν τὸν ὕψιστον (...) καὶ ἐστιν ἡ μετάνοια καλὴ σφόδρα παρθένος καθαρὰ καὶ γελῶσα πάντοτε καὶ ἐστιν ἐπεικὴς καὶ πραεῖα. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὁ πατὴρ ὁ ὕψιστος ἀγαπᾷ αὐτὴν καὶ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι αἰδοῦνται αὐτὴν.[170]

After the man from heaven's theoretical explanation, Aseneth undertakes a role that could be proper of the earthly counterpart of Repentance. In fact, the messenger from

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[169] Interestingly it is Pentephres, Egyptian priest and venerable man, who reassures Joseph about Aseneth's virtue, saying that their daughter 'is a virgin like you today', and like his own sister. Virginity is applied to men no earlier than the first century A.D., in the context of the ancient novel and Christian narratives.

[170] *J & A*, 15.7-8.

heaven calls her a 'saint virgin', παρθένος ἁγνή[171], worth of Joseph's and the angels' ἀγάπη. Consequently, Aseneth's confession to the God of Joseph turns into a psalm of praise to thank the Lord, just as Repentance does in the transcendent realm: 'εὐλογημένος κύριος ὁ θεὸς σου ὁ ὕψιστος ὃς ἐξαπέστειλέ σε τοῦ ῥύσασθαί με ἐκ τοῦ σκότους καὶ ἀναγαγεῖν με ἀπὸ τῶν θεμελίων τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ εὐλογημένον τὸ ὄνομά σου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.[172] In Aseneth's psalm of praise, a distinction is sketched between the upper realm of God, of the angels and saint figures, to where Aseneth is elevated, and the deep 'recesses of the abyss', which are related to darkness. This imagery belongs in the language of divine creation, reminiscent of *Genesis 1.2b* and Gnostic-early Christian revisions of the biblical passage; in fact early Christian theologians interpreted the 'deep' of the abyss as the matter that exists below the primordial waters.[173]

If we continue to explore the myth of creation of the *Apocryphon of John*, we will find that Wisdom-Sophia is made the spirit 'hovering' (ἐπεφέρετο) above the waters. In contrast to Jewish traditions that elevated the personification of Wisdom to a divine entity,[174] this Gnostic Sophia has to experience repentance because having presumed to be self-sufficient she conceives a son without her divine husband. Indeed, the dynamic action of floating above the waters is interpreted in versions of the apocryphon as Sophia's 'rushing to and fro' after seeing the dreadful outcome of her deed; μετάνοια itself implies a dynamic action. Sophia's son Yaldabaoth is in fact a terrifying and disloyal creature, the demiurge of the material world and the cause of evil in creation. Thus it seems that both the *Apocryphon of John* and *J & A* have revisited a Jewish religious notion, Wisdom or Sophia, in original terms. As a

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[171] *J & A*, 15.10.
[172] *J & A*, 15.12.
[173] *Gen.*, 1.2: Ἡ δὲ γῆ ἦν ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος, καὶ σκότος ἐπάνω τῆς ἀβύσσου· καὶ πνεῦμα Θεοῦ ἐπεφέρετο ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος. See Pleše (2006) 225.
[174] In *Wisdom of Solomon*, for instance, the Wise Man finds rest in Wisdom (Wis Sol 8.16), and 'she rescues from their troubles all who serve her (Wis Sol 10.9)', as Kraemer has pointed out. Kraemer (1998) 61 quotes these passages in order to highlight analogies between the portrayal of Wisdom in the homonymous pseudepigraphon and the variant attributes of Repentance in the long version of *J & A* e.g. the 'place of rest' as compared to the corresponding element of the 'bridal chamber' in the short text. Moreover, the short text of the novel omits or disregards to specify the place of Repentance in heavens, whereas the long text adds that Metanoia in the heavens is 'a beautiful and exceedingly good daughter of the Most High' (15.7), which may correspond to the place of Wisdom 'in the heavens, by the throne of God's glory', in Wis Sol 8.10.

female character potentially representing Sophia, Aseneth at the beginning of the story despises all men and ignores the one true God of Joseph and Israel. Like the imperfect Sophia of the apocryphon, Aseneth has to undergo a mystical movement of repentance to be saved from darkness and take part in the realm of light. In addition, when the man from heaven compares the seven maidens at Aseneth's service to the seven pillars of the City of Refuge which Aseneth will become, the image recalls the allegorical house of Wisdom which in the book of *Proverbs* is depicted as built on seven pillars illustrating the seven attributes of God.[175] Aseneth's characterization as the embodiment of Wisdom tells the reader something about the use of gender in the novel. Ross Shepard Kraemer interpreted Aseneth's transformation from an Egyptian worshiper of idols to her role as a mother of Israel and a City of Refuge as an allegorical passage from her representation as the foreign/strange woman of biblical reminiscence to the embodiment of Wisdom, a religious entity in Hebrew lore.[176]

The biblical source represents therefore a fundamental inter-text for the Gnostic apocryphon and *J & A*. The narrative framework of the relevant biblical verses of *Proverbs* that contain the portrayal of Wisdom as opposed to the foreign woman is similar to the context of the announciation scene in *J & A*: the narrator instructs an interlocutor whom he addresses as a son and pronounces blessed the man who can hear his words. In the allegory of *Proverbs*, Wisdom is personified as a woman who 'has killed her beasts; she has mingled her wine in a bowl, and prepared her table'.[177] The symbolic beasts can be interpreted, in line with Jewish-Hellenistic thought, as the passions which the wise man is able to subdue rather than becoming a prey to them. A parallel image can be seen in Aseneth's confession to God, when she refers to the big lion which pursues her, while its cubs are the gods of the Egyptians. In this instance the lion may be an ambivalent figure, not only representing a biblical image for strength, majesty and fierceness, but at the same time standing for the wrath of God and a pagan daemon, which is now chasing Aseneth: ἰδοὺ γὰρ ὁ λέων ὁ ἄγριος ὁ παλαιὸς καταδιώκει με διότι αὐτός ἐστι πατὴρ τῶν θεῶν

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[175] *Prov.*, 9.1: Ἡ σοφία ᾠκοδόμησεν ἑαυτῇ οἶκον, καὶ ὑπήρεισε στύλους ἑπτά.
[176] Kraemer (1998) 25-27; 193-196.
[177] *Prov.*, 9.3: Ἔσφαξε τὰ ἑαυτῆς θύματα, ἐκέρασεν εἰς κρατῆρα τὸν ἑαυτῆς οἶνον, καὶ ἡτοιμάσατο τὴν ἑαυτῆς τράπεζαν.

τῶν Αἰγυπτίων καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ εἰσιν οἱ θεοὶ τῶν εἰδωλομανῶν.[178] Egypt is depicted as the land of passions in Philo of Alexandria's treatises, while in the passage of Aseneth's confession Egyptian deities are debased as several and therefore weaker idols, possibly representing negative impulses. On the other hand the wine and bowl of Wisdom, her laying a table and offering her bread in the following verses of *Proverbs*, constitute ritual elements which can be associated with the triad bread-cup-ointment in *J & A*. Moreover, as in the novel bread, cup and ointment can be either rescuing or harmful, in *Proverbs* the figure of a strange woman, counterpart of Wisdom, speaks shamelessly and offers to passers-by 'secret bread, and the sweet water of theft'.[179] As Kraemer has remarked, Aseneth's speaking and thought change from being expressed out of ignorance and boldness to representing the discourse of Wisdom.[180] Like the Jewish apocrypha or novellas, such as *Esther*, *Judith* and *Tobit*, *J & A* can therefore be interpreted as an allegorical tale signifying in universalistic terms the history and ideological pattern of the Jews in the Hellenistic time.[181]

Similar female personifications of virtues and concepts constituted a rhetorical device, allied of allegory, in Hellenistic texts. In its construction of significant imagery, *J & A* finds its own rhetorical features, parallel to those of philosophical pagan texts, rather than only drawing on the biblical model; the result is an allegorical novel devised to convey a complex message to a learned expected audience. A philosophical eclectic work can be compared to the novel of *J & A*, the *Tablet of Cebes*. This philosophical treatise contains points of contact with devices of biblical exegesis and didactic instruction, such as the theoretical parts of *J & A*. The text purports to be the description of a votive tablet, engraved with an allegorical drawing which represents possible ethical patterns for human beings and personifications of abstract concepts. The *Tablet* had a significant cultural influence from antiquity: it was known in the second century A.D. to Lucian, Tertullian and

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[178] *J & A*, 12.9.
[179] *Prov.*, 9.17.
[180] Kraemer (1998) 195. See *J & A*, 4.12: ... θρασέως καὶ μετὰ ἀλαζονείας καὶ ὀργῆς ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ (to Pentephres); *J & A*, 6.3: ἐγὼ δὲ ἄφρων καὶ θρασεῖα...
[181] Kraemer (1998) 191-193. For instance, Judith may not be a historical character, but a universal figure representing a 'Jew-ess', the concept of being a Jew in the time of Diaspora.

possibly Julius Pollux. As Fitzgerald and White have remarked in their rich commentary, the *Tablet* might be both a source and a work sharing points of contact for authors active in the intellectual context of the Second Sophistic, such as Dio Chrysostom and Favorinus of Arles. We have already seen that the wording-imagery of passages from the *Corpus Hermeticum* are strikingly similar to *J & A*, while the possible reference to the *Tablet*, which seems to be quoted at the end of Zosimus' testimony, indicates cultural points of contact between allegorical-philosophical texts.[182] Of course, the *Tablet* can also be compared for its literary features to the ancient novels. In fact, Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe & Cleitophon* begins with the description of a painting that represents the mythical heroine Europa, whereas Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* is a narrative presented in the framework of an ἔκφρασις. In the ancient Greek novels entire descriptions of emblematic places, scenes, accounts of journeys and adventures may be considered allegorical. In particular the most sophistic Achilles Tatius' novel and Heliodorus' *Ethiopian Stories* seem to be privileged sources of allegorical material open to literary, exegetical and philosophical interpretation.[183] Still in the Second Sophistic cultural milieu, Lucian's variegated writings offer multiplied examples of allegorical modes: from the fantasy-journey to the moon in the *Varia Historia*, which enfolds philosophical-satirical considerations in the description of a topsy-turvy world, mirror of the author's contemporary experience, to the dialogues between hypostasized concepts and/about the authorial persona in the unconventionally autobiographical *Dream* and *Double Indictment*.[184]

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[182] See Fitzgerald-White (1983) 7-8 and 34, n. 47. In Scott (1936) testimony [8] 106: [καὶ βλέψαι τὸν πίνακα ὃν καὶ βιτος γράψας], in which the emendated text reads Κέβητος, perhaps from τὸν Πίνακα τὸν Κέβητος. The text of the testimony seems to invite the reader to look at the drawing and see the Son of God/Man becoming all things; as in Gnostic books the teaching was illustrated through pictures or diagrams, an interpretation of these fragmentary testimonies is given that sees for instance a representation of the struggle between the higher and the lower man as illustrated in the Gospels, the *Tablet*, Plato and the *Corpus Hermeticum*; see Scott (1936), 129 n. to testimonies 13-20.

[183] See Repath (2001) for the use of personal names, narrative framework/devices and literary-philosophical allusions derived from Platonic dialogues in Achilles Tatius; Most (2007) for concise remarks on the complex blending of allegory and narrative in Heliodorus; for instance, even the name of the hero, Theagenes, seems to hint at Theagenes of Rhegium, the sixth century B.C. philosopher and precursor in Homeric allegoresis.

[184] The attribute of unconventional which is here applied to these essays refers to Lucian's originality in playing with existent rhetorical-philosophical modes. In the *Dream* or *Life of Lucian*, the hypostases of Sculpture and Culture appear to the boy Lucian on his first day of work at his uncle's shed. Paideia, so important a concept in the Second Sophistic, is presented as a virtue that speaks in

In the symbolic representation of the *Tablet* the female figure which embodies true Education (Παιδεία) stands on a firm, square basis, whereas the hypostasis of Fortune (Τύχη) is blind and rolls continuously on a slippery sphere. The *Tablet* is featured as a literary dialogue between a group of viewers wondering about the significance of the scene depicted and a wise old man able to decode it. The dialogue is retold in a flash-back by a first person narrator, one of the witnesses to the explanation of the visual allegory. When the educated old man addresses his audience in the fictitious dialogue, an implicit connection is established between the unknown author of the *Tablet* and his anticipated readers, and at the same time a mysterious provenance of the votive object is given:

> Οὐδὲν δεινὸν πάσχετε, ὦ ξένοι, ἔφη, ἀποροῦντες περὶ τῆς γραφῆς ταύτης· οὐδὲ γὰρ τῶν ἐπιχωρίων πολλοὶ οἴδασι, τί ποτε αὕτη ἡ μυθολογία δύναται· οὐδὲ γάρ ἐστι πολιτικὸν ἀνάθημα· ἀλλὰ ξένος τις πάλαι ποτὲ ἀφίκετο δεῦρο, ἀνὴρ ἔμφρων καὶ δεινὸς περὶ σοφίαν, λόγῳ τε καὶ ἔργῳ Πυθαγόρειόν τινα καὶ Παρμενίδειον ἐζηλωκὼς βίον, ὃς τό τε ἱερὸν τοῦτο καὶ τὴν γραφὴν ἀνέθηκε τῷ Κρόνῳ.[185]
> Do not be afraid, strangers, he said, of being at a loss about this painting; in fact neither many natives know what this story-telling may signify, nor it is a votive offering of the city, but a stranger one day long time ago came here, a man endowed with sound reason and amazing wisdom, who by his words and deeds complied with a Pythagorean and Parmenidean choice of life; so it was him who dedicated this temple and painting to Kronos.

The first-person narrator continues to act as the *senex*'s interlocutor in the account of the tablet. The old sage reveals that he knew the wise stranger and used to be in awe of him for a long time, being younger. In the old days, people could listen to the explanation of the graphic story represented in the tablet. At the narrative time of the tablet itself, the wise man undertakes the role of instructor. In fact his interlocutor, acting as the voice of the whole group of viewers, is keen to know the explanation, although a warning is bound up with the tablet itself.[186] Decoding its

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Attic Greek and promises socio-economical prestige. The rhetorical device used by Lucian has its antecedent in Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles*, in which young Heracles needs to choose between the roads of Happiness and Vice; the myth was made famous by Xenophon's Socrates at *Memorabilia*, II.1.21-34. In *Double Indictment* Lucian significantly assumes the character of 'the Syrian', and is lodged by personified Rhetoric and Dialogue. See Swain (2007) esp. 24-26.

[185] *C.T.*, 2.

[186] *C.T.*, 3: (…) ἐπικίνδυνόν τι ἔχει ἡ ἐξήγησις, the interpretation carries a warning.

sense is like the myth of the Sphinx in Oedipus' story: if the true meaning of the riddle contained in the engraving is delivered correctly, the interpreter will be rescued, whereas a wrong interpretation of the tablet will lead to its deviser's ruin. This warning contains in itself an ethical sense, signifying the wreck of human beings' moral judgement should they fail to understand the deeper message the tablet conveys under the surface of the scene depicted.

> ὅτι, εἰ μὲν προσέξετε, ἔφη, καὶ συνήσετε τὰ λεγόμενα, φρόνιμοι καὶ εὐδαίμονες ἔσεσθε· εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἄφρονες καὶ κακοδαίμονες καὶ πικροὶ καὶ ἀμαθεῖς γενόμενοι, κακῶς βιώσεσθε. ἔστι γὰρ ἡ ἐξήγησις ἐοικυῖα τῷ τῆς Σφιγγὸς αἰνίγματι, ὃ ἐκείνη προεβάλλετο τοῖς ἀνθρώποις. εἰ μὲν οὖν αὐτὸ συνίη τις, ἐσώζετο· εἰ δὲ μὴ συνίη, ἀπώλετο ὑπὸ τῆς Σφιγγός. [187]
>
> That is, if you will be attentive and will understand what it says, you will be sensible and blessed with a happy life; otherwise, becoming foolish, unfortunate, bitter and ignorant, you will live unhappily. In fact the explanation is similar to the riddle of the Sphinx, which she used to propose to men. Then if one understood it, he was spared, but if one did not understand, was destroyed by the Sphinx.

In the above passage parallelism of terms bearing analogous or opposite significance conveys the idea of a twofold pattern, in which one way leads to the moral, virtuous life, whereas the other one hinders human rational faculty and therefore virtue. The deeper sense, which underlies the Theban myth of Oedipus and the Sphinx, is the core of the whole *Tablet*, only anticipated in the narrative framework of the initial dialogical scenes and gradually disclosed as the description of the painting is explained. The picture represents human life as a journey through subsequent enclosures. The first circle stands for entrance into Life itself and it is presided over by the hypostasis of Deceit (Ἀπάτη), which offers to the crowd entering life a potion instilled with its influence (ποτίζει τὴν ἑαυτῆς δύναμιν) of ignorance (Ἄγνοια) and error (Πλάνος), causing her victims to wander after Opinion and Desire.[188] In fact, as the old sage explains, those who rely on ignorance and error are not able to find the road of truth in life, but wander without a purpose.[189]

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[187] *C.T.*, 3.

[188] Fitzgerald-White (1983) 9-11; *C.T.*, 4-6: Ἀπάτη (…) ἡ πάντας τοὺς ἀνθρώπους πλανῶσα.

[189] *C.T.*, 6: οὐχ εὑρίσκουσι ποία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀληθινὴ ὁδὸς ἡ ἐν τῷ βίῳ, ἀλλὰ πλανῶνται εἰκῇ. However, as it is clarified in the previous speech, a way towards salvation is still open and possible;

The old master of interpretation explains that the woman standing precariously on a round rock is Fortune (Τύχη) personified, which is blind, frantic and deaf.[190] This representation of Τύχη signifies that fortuitous events in human life can subvert material goods dramatically; experience shows that people can see their wealth or success increase or fall without a criterion of justice and merit.[191] For this reason the hypostasis of Τύχη carries the emblems of uncertainty, which stand for her untrustworthiness.[192]When questioned about the relevant token, the sage explains that precisely Fortune's position on a round rock signifies (σημαίνει)[193] that her gifts are neither steadfast nor secure, so that a fall may occur, serious and hard, in case one trusted her.[194]

Other female figures, resembling courtesans, embody vices, like the strange woman of the biblical tradition, which might represent a model for Aseneth's portrayal in the first part of the novel, as we have seen. These figures meet those who appear to be happy because Fortune has blessed them, promise a pleasant life without toil or sorrow and make the ones they have persuaded enter the second enclosure, which is the domain of Luxury or Pleasure (Ἡδυπάθεια). For some time the individual believes to lead an easy life, until he realizes that 'was being devoured and violated by her'. This way he will have dissipated all he had received from Fortune

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other female figures are personifications of opinions (Δόξαι), desires (Ἐπιθυμίαι) and pleasures (Ἡδοναὶ); they try to accompany people of the crowd entering Life, leading them either towards ultimate salvation or to perdition on account of Ἀπάτη: αἱ μὲν (*sc.* ἀπάγουσιν αὐτοὺς) εἰς τὸ σώζεσθαι, ἔφη· αἱ δὲ εἰς τὸ ἀπόλλυσθαι διὰ τὴν ἀπάτην. These categories that is, opinions, desires and pleasures are therefore ambivalent or indifferent, in philosophical terms. Especially opinion (Δόξα) can lead either to true or to false education, as it is explained in *C.T.*, 11.

[190]*C.T.*, 7: … οὐ μόνον τυφλὴ, ἀλλὰ καὶ μαινομένη καὶ κωφή.

[191]Wealth is discussed in detail in chapter 39 of the Tablet.

[192]In the allegory, Fortune revolves continuously and from her unsteady position grabs people's possessions to give them to someone else; then she may randomly rob again what she gave and pass it to other people, purposelessly and insecurely. *C.T.*, 7: περιπορεύεται πανταχοῦ… καὶ παρ' ὧν μὲν ἁρπάζει τὰ ὑπάρχοντα, καὶ ἑτέροις δίδωσι· παρὰ δὲ τῶν αὐτῶν πάλιν ἀφαιρεῖται παραχρῆμα ἃ δέδωκε, καὶ ἄλλοις δίδωσιν εἰκῇ καὶ ἀβεβαίως. A meta-literary thought concludes the old man's speech about the nature of Τύχη: διὸ καὶ τὸ σημεῖον καλῶς μηνύει τὴν φύσιν αὐτῆς, Therefore the clue clearly indicates her nature.

[193]The verb is used in the interlocutor's question.

[194]οὐκ ἀσφαλὴς οὐδὲ βεβαία ἐστὶν ἡ παρ' αὐτῆς δόσις. ἐκπτώσεις γὰρ μεγάλαι καὶ σκληραὶ γίγνονται, ὅταν τις αὐτῇ πιστεύῃ. As remarked in the commentary by Fitzgerald-White (1983) 142, n. 29, Dio reverses the perspective, attributing 'disappointments and calamities to the failure to trust Tychē' in his discourses 64.25-26; 65.1.

and will be prey to the same vices which enticed him. The subsequent realization of one's actual state is defined as a 'coming to senses', ἀνανήφειν, a significant word with a philosophical moralising connotation.[195]

J & A conveys its ethical-religious outlook through analogous symbolic images and hypostases of spiritual concepts. If in the tablet of Cebes conditions of life and types of the human soul are represented as female figures, Aseneth in the novel assumes a universal significance, embodying the passage from a deceiving state of mind to superior wisdom. Moralising notions are illustrated in the setting of the novel, which contains ambivalent images. For instance, the high tower where Aseneth lives may stand for the difficulty to achieve virtue, signifying at the same time that the heroine is entrenched in her system of values before her encounter with Joseph. It is in fact noteworthy that the narrator of the novel qualifies Aseneth with negative attributes in the same paragraph which informs about the penthouse and Aseneth's sheltered life. The sense of this ambiguous portrayal of Aseneth in connection with the tower can easily be missed because of the fairy-tale-like atmosphere which characterises descriptions in the novel. However, Aseneth's femininity is used as a significant category to represent virtues and wisdom, of which μετάνοια or 'change of heart' is a manifestation. The initial ambiguity of Aseneth's portrayal is solved with her confession to the God of Joseph and the confirmatory miracle during the descent of the man from heaven.

> Καὶ ἦν Ἀσενὲθ ἐξουθενοῦσα καὶ καταπτύουσα πάντα ἄνδρα καὶ ἦν ἀλαζὼν καὶ ὑπερήφανος πρὸς πάντα ἄνθρωπον. καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνὴρ ἑώρακεν αὐτὴν πώποτε, καθότι ἦν πύργος τῷ Πεντεφρῇ παρακείμενος τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ μέγας καὶ ὑψηλὸς σφόδρα.[196]
> And Aseneth looked down at all men with contempt, and she was self-important and haughty towards everyone. In addition, no man had ever seen her, because Pentephres had a tower adjacent to his house, (and it was) big and very high.

In addition the novel illustrates a twofold pattern for human beings as a symbolic use of bread, cup and ointment, elements related to everyday custom which

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[195] ὅταν γὰρ ἀνανήψῃ, αἰσθάνεται ὅτι οὐκ ἤσθιεν, ἀλλ' ὑπ' αὐτῆς κατησθίετο καὶ ὑβρίζετο.
[196] *J & A*, 2.1.

recall a ritual practice. In particular, the cup that can signify opposing qualities, of either blessed immortality or corruption can be compared with the potions offered to the soul by the allegorical figures in the Tablet of Cebes. The motif of bread-cup-ointment in *J & A* finds no specific correspondence in Jewish-Christian known rituals or passages of Scripture.[197] Therefore, the image appears to be significant on the philosophical-moralising plane as well as on the literary level of *J & A*. Indeed, food and drink are symbolic and as nourishment passes through the mouth it is associated with speech and the significant words it conveys. During the miracle of the honeycomb and bees, the divine envoy explains to Aseneth that with the honey she has eaten bread of life, and drunk a cup of immortality, and she has anointed (herself) with an oil of incorruptibility.[198] A deceitful contrast between life and death is presented as the counterpart of the true one in the mendacious tale of the son of Pharaoh, when the prince attempts to gain the help of Joseph's brothers.[199] The purpose of this excursus about the *Tablet of Cebes* aimed to show that the novel of *J & A* conveys biblical lore in Jewish-Christian perspective while exploiting rhetorical techniques which were common in Hellenistic philosophical-moralising texts. Thus, the aforementioned biblical verses depicting Wisdom as a rescuing woman and her strange negative counterpart may offer the source of the novel's construction of its heroine. However, the description of Aseneth and the allegory of Repentance, as well as the symbolic imagery embedded in the novel, can be better understood through a parallel reading of philosophical-allegorizing texts such as the eclectic pagan *Tablet of Cebes*, a figurative explanation of the pattern of human life and its sense in the cosmos.

In this respect, it is noteworthy that both the *Apocryphon of John* and *J & A* connect a superior realm of God and spiritual creatures to divine creation on earth, the existence of the material world and the significance of human life into this twofold cosmos. In addition, both texts draw on a few biblical verses to construct an

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[197] *J & A*, 8.5; 8.9.
[198] *J & A*, 16.16.
[199] *J & A*, 24.7: Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ υἱὸς Φαραώ· »ἰδοὺ εὐλογία καὶ θάνατος πρὸ προσώπου ὑμῶν· λάβετε μᾶλλον ὑμεῖς τὴν εὐλογίαν καὶ μὴ τὸν θάνατον… And the son of Pharaoh said to them: 'Here good fortune and death are in front of you: you take the good fortune rather than death… In the speech of the Pharaoh's son the opposition life/death is transposed on its practical sense of murdering enemies in order to survive'.

original narrative which subtly comments on and reinterprets the Holy Scripture. The *Apocryphon* retells the mythical account of Creation, adding divine characters to the version of *Genesis* which only presents one Creator God; the account of primeval life on earth aims to explain in this Gnostic text the opposition of good and evil, the significance of knowledge and understanding and the place of man in the universe. Although *J & A* may seem a completely different story of a woman's conversion to Judaism/Christianity which was motivated by love and the right ethical-religious choice to embrace the faith in the one true God, the imagery of the novel hints at divine Creation as the universal paradigm for individual conversion or change of heart. A realm of the light, corresponding to truth and life as opposed to darkness, error and death is also outlined in the novel; in this superior dimension belong God the Most High, the heavenly messenger, Repentance and Aseneth as a rescuing City of Refuge. The fictional time of the story in *J & A* sets both dimensions of light and darkness as parallel conditions for the human soul, leaving a twofold choice to human beings in a way similar to philosophical Hellenistic traditions as well as to the Gnostic ethical-metaphysical dualism. The blending of Hellenistic philosophical thought and Jewish-Christian mysticism in *J & A* is an important clue to the understanding of its place in ancient religious-literary contexts. In fact, like the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John* combined Plato's *Timaeus* and Moses' heritage, the novel of *J & A* seems to be constructed on a similar cultural adaptation of Hellenic philosophy and Jewish lore; this complex cultural discourse was subsequently inherited in centuries of Christianity.

2.5 Origen's Commentary *On the Song of Songs* and the Allegorical Senses of Love.

From the lyric canticle included in the Hebrew Bible and translated in the Septuagint, the *Song of Songs* ascribed by both Christian and Jewish tradition to the king of

Israel Solomon,[200] Origen obtained the figurative material to compose *Homilies* and an extensive commentary, which is now extant in Greek fragments and in the partial Latin translation by Rufinus. In the following analysis I consider passages from the novel of *J & A* in comparison to Origen's allegorical interpretation of the *Song of Songs* in the Greek fragments of his commentary. This comparison supports my view of *J & A* as an allegorical novel with rhetorical devices embedded in its narrative. On the other hand in his commentary Origen spells out the significance of the canticle by illustrating the value of its imagery in Christological terms. Indeed, the *Song of Songs* was received as a complex religious text in Rabbinic and early Christian thought. Rabbi Akiba in the early second century A.D. solemnly declared that 'the entirety of time/the whole world is not worth of the day the canticle was given to Israel'.[201] Unless the underlying senses of the *Song of Songs* were grasped, however, the canticle might have been mistaken for a profane hymn celebrating physical love,[202] thus resulting in being inappropriate for the education of the young. For this reason rabbinic tradition restricted the reading of the 'most high song'[203] to those who had reached thirty years of age. For Origen the interpretation of the *Song of Songs* represented the acme of his research, which he dictated in his old age; in the prologue to the commentary he warned those who had not freed themselves yet from the affects of matter to abstain from the reading of the canticle and the explanations offered about it.

From a literary comparison between passages of Origen's commentary and the novel of *J & A* it will emerge that the Church Father's exegesis offers points for a

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[200] King Solomon lived in the tenth century B.C. However, the canticle is a later work. According to authoritative Italian scholars, the *Song of Songs* is composed by a series of epigrams, written by an Hellenised Jew in the first century B.C. I have not read the works by Garbini and Simonetti, so I cannot argue in the present work how they explain the relation of the Hebrew canticle to its Septuagint version. See Barbàra (2005) 61.

[201] The quotation can be found in *Mishnah Yadaym*, 3.5, the sixth and last order of the mishnah, which deals with the topic of hands purity; the question of canonicity of the holy books is related to the uncleanliness of hands because Scripture is seen as an offering to God while the necessity to distinguish between canonical and non-canonical writings is disputed. The *Song of Songs* was inserted in the Jewish canon after the law and the prophets, in the *ketuvim* or hagiographa.

[202] Rabbi Akiba himself attests that people could sing the canticle in banquets or inns; Barbàra (2005) 62.

[203] It will be probably well known but it is useful to remember that the title of 'song of songs', in the Septuagint ᾆσμα ᾀσμάτων, comes from the Hebrew superlative, which renders our 'the highest', like in analogous forms 'king of kings', 'holy of holies' that is the *sancta sanctorum*, to indicate the holiest and most secret part of the Jewish Temple.

more secure basis to our understanding of the significance of *J & A* in early Christian contexts. In fact, Origen explains the deeper senses of the bride and groom's spiritual love, which is illustrated in physical terms. Thus, in Origen's interpretation the canticle appears to be an epithalamion with profound religious senses to detect. In much the same way, for its later readers and copyists revising it like successive authors, *J & A* conveyed a mystical religious message under the features of an erotic novel. It is noteworthy that elements loaded with further significance in Origen's commentary to the canticle receive a similar value in the novel: parts of the woman's body such as her breasts, lips and cheeks represent metaphors for the nourishing effect of the word of God and the prophets. Moreover, elements of the landscape which are described in both literary works are pregnant with further significance and intermingle with features of the characters' body. In particular the woman becomes a sacred land, allegory of virtues and the divine word.

From the verse of the canticle Φιλησάτω με ἀπὸ φιλημάτων στόματος αὐτοῦ, 'May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth', Origen infers that the bride wishes not to be married conventionally according to the prophets' traditions, but otherwise:

> Δι'ἑαυτοῦ δὲ ὁμιλησάτω κατ'αἴσθησιν πνευματικήν, δι' ἧς ὁ Ἰωάννης φησί· Καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς.[204]
> May he himself unite in bond (with me) according to the spiritual sense; in this sense indeed John says: 'And our hands have examined the word of life'.

Love scenes in the canticle are interpreted by Origen as the quest of the soul for wisdom or the mystical union of the Church with Christ. Therefore the bride asks for her beloved's kisses, signifying that she wants to be metaphorically married to the Lord according to the spiritual sense (κατ'αἴσθησιν πνευματικήν). The quotation from the first letter of John explains the physical action of touching with hands as the searching for the word of life (περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς). The mouth becomes the means of passage for the divine doctrine, as Origen develops the erotic imagery of the canticle adding metaphorical and spiritual senses to it:

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[204] Origen, commentary to *Song of Songs*, 1.2.

> Ὁσάκις δέ τι ζητοῦντες θεῖον δόγμα καταλαμβάνομεν, καταπεφιλῆσθαι ἀπὸ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ νυμφίου νομίσωμεν.[205]
> Every time in our search we grasp a divine doctrine we want to believe that we have been kissed by the groom's mouth.

Analogous senses seem to be embedded in the narrative of *J & A*. In fact, the reduplication of Aseneth's beloved in the figure of the divine envoy which anticipates Joseph's return may correspond to the spouse's figurative marriage to the groom or to God in Origen's commentary. Interestingly, the novel contains features of a commentary for its allegorical senses, which are disguised as novelistic commonplaces. The most evident example of this narrative-exegetical strategy is indeed the scene of the kisses exchanged by Joseph and Aseneth when the hero returns to Heliopolis to find a beautifully transformed Aseneth; while kissing like the protagonists of the erotic Greek novels Joseph and Aseneth, as the author(s) remark(s), infuse new life in their soul, and especially Aseneth receives the spirits of life, wisdom and truth. It is feasible that the passage was an interpretive addition to the kissing scene of the novel; Joseph and Aseneth become thus a paradigm of spiritual love.

> καὶ κατεφίλησεν ὁ Ἰωσὴφ τὴν Ἀσενὲθ καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῇ πνεῦμα ζωῆς, καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτὴν τὸ δεύτερον καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῇ πνεῦμα σοφίας, καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτὴν τὸ τρίτον καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῇ πνεῦμα ἀληθείας.[206]
> Joseph kissed Aseneth and gave her spirit of life, and he kissed her for the second time and gave her spirit of wisdom, and he kissed her for the third time and gave her spirit of truth.

The encounter between Aseneth and the man from heaven contains symbols related to this pregnant imagery. Indeed, Aseneth is astonished when she finds the honeycomb in her room, as the divine envoy has foreseen, however she can grasp the correct meaning of the event: has the honeycomb come perhaps from the angel's mouth, as from it emanates the same breath of life? 'κύριε, ἐγὼ οὐκ εἶχον κηρίον μελίσσης ἐν τῷ ταμιείῳ μου πώποτε, ἀλλὰ σὺ ἐλάλησας καὶ γέγονε. Μήτιγε τοῦτο ἐκ τοῦ στόματός σοῦ ἐξῆλθη, διότι ἡ πνοὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς πνοὴ

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[205] Origen, commentary to *Song of Songs*, 1.2a.
[206] *J & A*, 19.11.

τοῦ στόματός σού ἐστιν;'[207] The breath or scent emanating from the honeycomb as well as from the angel's mouth corresponds to the spirit of life. This spirit is conveyed by the sacred word of God, so that the honeycomb may be a figure for a holy book or parchment; perhaps in a sophisticated connection to this image of the honeycomb, Aseneth describes in her litany of confession to God her mouth, tongue and lips dried out like musical- writing material:

καὶ ἄρτον οὐκ ἔφαγον καὶ ὕδωρ οὐκ ἔπιον· καὶ τὸ στόμα μου γέγονε ξηρὸν ὡς τύμπανον καὶ ἡ γλῶσσά μου ὡς κέρας καὶ τὰ χείλη μου ὡς ὄστρακον.[208]
And bread I did not eat and water I did not drink; and my mouth became dry like a drum and my tongue like a horn and my lips like a shell.

The bride of the canticle emanates a sweet scent like the novel's divine envoy and honeycomb; from her lips drips honey of a honeycomb and under her tongue flow milk and honey.[209] In Origen's interpretation, the bride's clothes illustrate the investiture of virtues according to Christ's teaching that is, 'profound compassion, goodness and humbleness'. As we have already seen in the previous paragraphs about the *Corpus Hermeticum* and alchemical treatises, Aseneth's clothes changing may represent both her inner transformation and her undertaking of Christian virtues in the later religious contexts of the novel's reception. Origen continues his exegesis of the spouse's description stating that her lips stand for the teachers, whereas honey and honeycombs illustrate the 'good discourses' woven by the prophets and apostles. Like Aseneth becomes a 'City of Refuge' for all those who repent, the bride of the canticle is depicted by Origen as an allegory of wisdom and virtues.

In early Christian contexts, the honeycomb represents a tangible sign of God's intervention and doctrine. Thus the novel's allegorical images may have passed from illustrating the word of God and the Temple of Jerusalem in a Jewish dimension and outlook to an interpretation of scriptural imagery parallel to Origen's commentary. In

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[207] *J & A*, 16.12.

[208] *J & A*, 13.9 … καὶ ἄρτον οὐκ ἔφαγον καὶ ὕδωρ οὐκ ἔπιον· καὶ τὸ στόμα μου γέγονε ξηρὸν καὶ τύμπανον καὶ ἡ γλῶσσά μου ὡς κέρας καὶ τὰ χείλη μου ὡς ὄστρακον.

[209] *Song of Songs*, 4.9-11: Καὶ ὀσμὴ ἱματίων σου ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ἀρώματα. Κηρίον ἀποστάζουσιν χείλη σου, νύμφη, μέλι καὶ γάλα ὑπὸ τὴν γλῶσσάν σου, καὶ ὀσμὴ ἱματίων σου ὡς ὀσμὴ Λιβάνου.

fact, the long text of *J & A* contains more details for the miracle scene, such as the new honeycomb which the bees start building on Aseneth's lips.[210]

While the significance of another honeycomb can be easily guessed from the context of the novel, in which Aseneth reaches superior wisdom that enables her to speak in tune with Joseph's ethics and the word of God, Origen's exegesis supports and even reinforces this insight. In fact, the bride's lips are interpreted as the teachers' speech, while the spouse's silence is praised as a virtue: Προστίθησι τῷ τῆς σωφροσύνης ἐπαίνῳ τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς σιωπῆς, ἐπισταμένης τῆς νύμφης καιροὺς λαλιᾶς ὡραίας καὶ ἐπαινουμένης σιγῆς.[211] Although the motif of silence is not made explicit in *J & A*, studies of the novel have emphasized that Aseneth's initial outburst with boldness and harsh words are criticized as inappropriate, whereas on the eighth day after the week of her ritual mourning, the narrator informs that she will not dare to open her mouth and pray to the Lord aloud; significantly, Aseneth takes no food or drink during the seven days of her repentance and confession.[212]

In both the *Song of Songs* and *J & A* the interplay between human figures and the setting they move in is noteworthy. In his commentary, Origen exposes underlying senses of descriptive elements, whereas in the novel significant points seem to be left subtly for the reader to decode; repetition of these clues, in a complex chain of relations between passages and scenes is allied of the allegorical process in *J*

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[210] *J & A*, 16.19-20: καὶ περιεπλάκησαν πᾶσαι αἱ μέλισσαι ἐκεῖναι τῇ Ἀσενὲθ ἀπὸ ποδῶν ἕως κεφαλῆς. καὶ ἄλλαι μέλισσαι ἦσαν μεγάλαι καὶ ἐκλεκταὶ ὡς βασίλισσαι αὐτῶν· καὶ ἐξανέστησαν ἀπὸ τῆς πληγῆς τοῦ κηρίου καὶ περιεπλάκησαν περὶ τὸ πρόσωπον Ἀσενὲθ καὶ ἐποίησαν ἐπὶ τῷ στόματι αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ χείλη αὐτῆς κηρίον ὅμοιον τῷ κηρίῳ τῷ παρακειμένῳ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ. καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ μέλισσαι ἤσθιον ἀπὸ τοῦ κηρίου τοῦ ὄντος ἐπὶ τῷ στόματι Ἀσενὲθ

[211] See fragment 36 in Barbàra (2005) 215, which is the Origen's commentary to *Song of Songs* 4.3 c-d. The spouse's cheek is compared to the skin of the pomegranate which hides and protects its pips, like the woman appropriately preserves her silence. The seeds of the pomegranate also represent doctrines of contemplation (τὰ θεωρήματα, τὰ σιωπώμενα δόγματα), which the wise man will keep concealed in the directive part of the soul (ἐν τῷ ἡγεμονικῷ).

[212] Esp. Inowlocki (2004). On the theme of the mouth that needs to be closed until it is purified by the proper nourishment and words cf. *J & A*, 10.17: καὶ οὗτος ἐποίησεν Ἀσενὲθ τὰς ἑπτὰ ἡμέρας καὶ ἄρτον οὐκ ἔφαγη καὶ ὕδωρ οὐκ ἔπιεν ἐν ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἡμέραις τῆς ταπεινώσεως αὐτῆς; *J & A*, 11.2: καὶ τὸ στόμα αὐτῆς ἦν κεκλεισμένον καὶ οὐκ ἤνοιξεν αὐτὸ ἐν ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἡμέραις καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἑπτὰ νυξὶ τῆς ταπεινώσεως αὐτῆς; *J & A*, 11.3-9: καὶ εἶπεν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς τὸ στόμα μὴ ἀνοίξασα (...) καὶ οὐκ ἔστι μοι τόλμη ἐπικαλέσασθαι κύριον τὸν θεὸν... διότι μεμίαται τὸ στόμα μου ἀπὸ τῶν θυσιῶν τῶν εἰδώλων.

& A. If we follow Ross Shepard Kraemer's accurate analysis of *J & A* and her literary comparison between the short and long versions of the novel, we may agree to consider longer descriptive scenes as posterior additions meant to offer a different view of the feminine role on the basis of more biblical inter-texts, such as indeed the *Song of Songs*. Of course, points of contact may derive from a shared literary-religious background, simply hinting at scriptural references and probably at a vast cultural baggage, both written and oral. However, a few scenes of the novel present more convincingly analogies with the imagery of the *Song of Songs* and interestingly with Origen's exegesis of the canticle. A good example is the scene of Joseph's initial refusal to exchange kisses with Aseneth; when she approaches the hero to kiss him as a sister would kiss her brother, according to Pentephres' words, Joseph keeps her at a distance by putting his hand on her chest among her breasts. In the long version(s) of the novel, the narrator seems to indulge with additional erotic details: Aseneth's breasts pop up like ripe apples, ἦσαν οἱ μασθοὶ αὐτῆς ἤδη ἑστῶτες ὥσπερ μῆλα ὡραῖα.[213] The supposed addition is however well integrated in the economy of the novel; in fact, the adjective ὡραίος is also attributed to Aseneth in her initial comparison to the Hebrew mothers[214], while the landscape of the courtyard in Heliopolis responds to the woman's description. Indeed, Pentephres' palace is surrounded by trees bearing fruit in the time of harvest, which illustrate metaphorically Aseneth's ripeness: καὶ ἦσαν πεφυτευμένα ἐντὸς τῆς αὐλῆς παρὰ τὸ τεῖχος δένδρα ὡραία παντοδαπὰ καὶ καρποφόρα πάντα. καὶ ἦν ὁ καρπὸς αὐτῶν πέπειρος, ὥρα γὰρ ἦν θερισμοῦ. [215] The detail of the trees growing along the wall of the courtyard renders the idea of a closed garden, which is a metaphor standing for the bride of the *Song of Songs*:

> Κῆπος κεκλεισμένος ἀδελφή μου νύμφη.
> Κῆπος κεκλεισμένος, πηγὴ ἐσφραγισμένη.[216]

Origen detects the significance of the repeated attribute of a closed garden as a hint at her progression in virtue: the bride will be a closed garden while acquiring virtue and

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[213] *J & A*, 8.5.
[214] *J & A*, 1.5: ὡραία ὡς Ῥεβέκκα…
[215] *J & A*, 2.11.
[216] *Song*, 4.12.

when she will have achieved her completion. In the *Targum* and in subsequent Christian exegesis the closed garden is also a symbol of firm precepts enshrining the virtuous soul, while the sealed spring may stand for the woman's chastity/virginity.[217] Moreover, the address to the bride as her beloved's sister can be noted as a striking parallel to the first encounter between Joseph and Aseneth, in which the protagonists are praised by Pentephres as being both virgins and exchange greetings like brother and sister, in contrast to Joseph's following rejection of Aseneth as a woman ἀλλοτρία. As Philonenko surmised, the diction of brother and sister in *J & A* may be a reference to the Pharaonic tradition which allowed marriages between siblings as well as an Egyptian colouring inspired by lyrics and poems. Possible points of contact with the *Song of Songs* and its rich allegorical commentary by Origen support a reading of the novel as a complex text at the crossroads of different cultures and religious sensibilities.

2.6 Conclusion: why Multiple Contexts for *J & A*.

The texts explored in connection with *J & A* in the present chapter have introduced the mystical-religious colouring of the novel from different angles. The composite *Corpus Hermeticum*, alchemical treatises, excerpts from the Jewish philosopher Philo's exegesis and the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John* have been chosen with the purpose of illustrating points of contact with the profound senses of *J & A* in different ages and literary-religious contexts. Indeed, *J & A* could be virtually understood in pagan environments not only for its literary devices, as I shall argue in the next chapter, but also for its versatile mysticism, which was shared in the backgrounds of Hellenism and Late Antiquity in Egypt, the lands prospecting the Mediterranean and the ancient Near East. Indeed, *J & A* is not only a unique example of ancient Jewish novel featuring commonplaces of the pagan romances while containing a Jewish-Christian religious message grounded on the Hellenistic Scripture. In fact, both form and content of Aseneth's story are also a testimony of inter-cultural relations between Jewish lore, its Christian inheritance and pagan religious-philosophical beliefs.

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[217] Origen, fragment 41 in Barbàra (2005) 221 and notes.

Chapter 3

The Allegorical Dimension of Narrative; Reading beyond the Literal Meaning

3.1 Introduction

In the first chapter, I have analysed *J & A* as a Jewish-Hellenistic narrative containing elements of religion, myth and ritual. In Chapter 2 I have considered *J & A* as the fluid, multiform product of a complex textual tradition that shares points of contact with allegorical/salvationist texts of pagan and Christian provenance, such as the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John*. Significant content is conveyed in these texts by means of allegorical imagery and rhetorical devices that assimilate *J & A* to Jewish narratives such as the *Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates*, the earliest record in fiction of the Hebrew Scripture's translation in Greek. It is noteworthy that *J & A* is featured as a sophisticated narrative by its anonymous author(s), as if they were able to move between different cultural systems. Indeed, the imagery and ethical-philosophical thrust of the novel share points of contact with Philo of Alexandria's allegorical interpretation of biblical episodes, so that *J & A* can be defined as a narrative pregnant with deeper senses and as a piece of rewritten Bible. The choice of texts in the present chapter will hopefully show that *J & A* was witness to poly-cultural environments both in its hypothetical Hellenistic-Jewish

milieu and throughout subsequent centuries of Christian readings and adaptations of its purposes. A survey of themes which *J & A* shares with early Jewish exegesis of biblical episodes has led my discussion in the previous chapters towards several suggestions about Jewish ideology and conceptions of cultural-religious identity in Hellenistic Judaism; the survey has been concluded by a comparison between Origen's allegorical commentary on *The Song of Songs* and the imagery of *J & A* in order to envision possible readings of the novel in early Christianity.

Thus, I have defined *J & A* as an allegorical novel with the support of textual examples in the previous paragraphs. Following this definition, in the present chapter I aim to analyse rhetorical techniques which allow us to compare the biblical love-story of Joseph and Aseneth to both Jewish and pagan interpretations of authoritative texts such as the Homeric poems and traditional myth/belief. Indeed, elements of allegory and symbolism in *J & A* constitute points of contact between the novel and learned exegetical commentaries. Specific features work as auxiliaries for allegorical imagery in the texts which will be considered: 1) the presence of similes that refer to the language of religious mysteries, conferring additional senses to narrative episodes, characters and places; 2) an underlying connection between emblematic landscape and the characters in the story; 3) the poly-semantic motif of silence as complementary to the sacred word of the oracles or divine announcement, which is expressed as mystical revelation of the truth, in contrast to the surface-level of human language; 4) the inclusion of myth and ritual in complex intellectual systems, which inherited Hellenic culture as an instrument to express original thought. As I shall explain in the following paragraphs, these features intermingle creating a complex text, dense with underlying senses.

We have seen that the language of mystery initiation is used in *J & A* to indicate Aseneth's change of heart and identity transformation. Space descriptions can be loaded with mystical-religious significance. Indeed, *J & A* invents a landscape loaded with symbolic senses. Aseneth's tower, the majestic walls and doors of the city create a rarefied imagery, for instance representing barriers or means of passage as communication between cultures. While the setting and *realia* in the novel carry a symbolic value, the landscape is related to characters by analogies between their attributes and descriptive elements of the surrounding space. Both inside and outside

space in *J & A* hint at significant religious concepts, which are expressed in the language of the Septuagint. It is noteworthy that the Septuagint represented not only the holy book for Jews of the Diaspora, but also their vocabulary, being the faithful translation of the original Hebrew Scripture. Septuagintal terms and concepts were recognisable by Greek-speaking Jewish and later by Christian readers. Thus the concept of the nation of Israel extending throughout various lands could be conveyed through descriptions of a symbolic space. For instance the 'field of inheritance', where Aseneth's parents go to fetch early produce at the time of harvest, may signify the cultural-religious heritage of Israel in the Hellenistic dispersion. Aseneth as an allegorical figure as well as a novelistic heroine welcomes her parents and rejoices over the offerings, 'dressed and adorned like a bride of God'.[1] Indeed, the field of inheritance illustrates her privileged role: Aseneth becomes the embodiment of the sacred land which has been allotted to the people of Israel and their descendants forever. Likewise, the vineyard in the land of Heliopolis is connoted as a sacred place, still flourishing in the time of the story despite the famine.[2] The presence of a symbolically connoted vineyard seems to be a Hellenistic-early Christian feature, because the Jews were not familiar with the motif.[3] The invention of a setting loaded with deeper senses is an elaborated narrative-rhetorical device. This feature is embedded in the novel, indicating a complex design behind the plain fairy-tale-like story. A pagan Hellenistic text, Philostratus' dialogue *Heroikos* is here analysed in parallel with *J & A* because of the sacred value it attributes to historical places loaded with mythical value as well as to natural landscape which is inhabited by the spirit of the Homeric hero Protesilaos. The literary analysis in section 3.2 shows that texts belonging in different religious cultures present points of contact, thus indicating

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[1] *J & A*, 4.1: κεκοσμημένην ὡς νύμφην θεοῦ.

[2] Assuming a reversed point of view as contrasted to the allegorical significance of the novel, the son of Pharaoh alludes subtly to Aseneth when he tells the guards that he wants to see his father the king before a trip to his newly-bolted vineyard. *J & A*, 25.2: ὄψεται βούλομαι τὸν πατέρα μου, διότι πορεύομαι τρυγῆσαι τὴν ἄμπελόν μου τὴν νεόφυτον. The prince is actually ready to murder his father, but the guards do not let him in the room.

[3] This point might be relevant for the interpretation of *J & A* as a religious text well received by Christians throughout the ages; interestingly, Hellenistic pagan authors mistook the sacred ornaments of the Jewish Temple for vines, but the Jews did not acknowledge this symbology or, to say it with Mark Edwards, they were not Dyonisus' devotees. See Edwards (1990a) 65.

relations between pagan, Jewish and Christian intellectual systems in the Hellenistic age.

J & A contains features of a biblical commentary because it retells a variant expanded story about Joseph and his Egyptian spouse, adding original themes which were significant in the contemporary environment of its composition and throughout the ages. While Scripture represented sacred history for the Jews in the Hellenistic age, interpretation of ancient myth and authoritative texts as hallowed sources of philosophical knowledge is widely attested in Hellenistic pagan environments. I argue that *J & A* may be a unique combination of Jewish narrative as sacred history and an exegetical commentary on episodes of Scripture; interestingly, the commentary in the novel is disguised as a form of narrative. In the following section 3.3, I shall point out parallels between *J & A* and a text of Homeric revisionism that is, Dio of Prusa's *Oration 61.* As already noted while considering Heraclitus the Allegorist, Homer is considered as the best source of knowledge in Hellenistic literary culture. Dio of Prusa, a complex figure of a rhetorician and a philosopher, explains the concept of the 'Homeric silence' that is, the omission of straightforward information on the poet's part. The true sense of the events has been left concealed 'between the lines' of the text. With the metaphor of a literary silence we can describe the underlying senses which were detected in the biblical account by Jewish exegetes and writers of biblical narratives, although the concept is not overtly expounded. In the novel of *J & A*, the theme of silence is significantly combined with the concept of the sacred word which is passed down from the divine sphere to Aseneth and therefore to humanity. In addition, dialogues and speeches occupy a substantial space in the narrative, containing important elements for the development of the plot as well as for the significance of the literary-religious work. However, although the narrator of *J & A* is omniscient, an authorial voice commenting on the events of the story is absent. Interestingly, Dio of Prusa devises his oration 'on Chryseïs or the Homeric silence' in the framework of a dialogue between his authorial persona and a female interlocutor, who is sceptical about his innovative interpretation of the Homeric character. Similarly, *J & A* entrusts significant concepts to dialogues, speeches and prayers, so that the characters undertake the role of instructors and exemplars for the reader. For instance, when Aseneth contradicts

Pentephres' speech in praise of Joseph, her point of view offers a useful ideological contrast, as if a veritable 'dialogical reading' of biblical episodes were prompted.[4]

In its literary fiction, the novel of *J & A* hints at the value of Israel as lore and at the ever-living presence of the Jewish heritage, which is preserved in Scripture and exegetical commentaries throughout centuries of Christianity. This purpose is implied in the narrative features of *J & A*, which make it similar to commentaries on authoritative texts. Indeed, the novel creates an enthralling context for Joseph's career and marriage in Egypt. In a blending of tradition and innovation, the role of the hero in the land of Pharaoh is celebrated with the account of Aseneth's conversion and worthiness as well as with Joseph's royalty on behalf of the Egyptian dynasty. Therefore, *J & A* comments on the elliptic biblical text, as if a crucial part of the story was omitted in the sacred books, and a novel-like expansion was needed in order to fill in the gap. As the analysis of Jewish narratives in the previous chapters has hopefully pointed out, the early Jewish *J & A* might have been conceived as an allegorical narrative that is, a text that communicated deeper truths to those able to read under the surface of the plain fairy-tale-like story. Graeco-Roman discussions of allegory and other rhetorical figures are essential in order to define the cultural background and purposes of *J & A*.

The present work posits that *J & A* was conceived as a Jewish-Hellenistic novel that is, a literary expression of Jewish religious sensibilities so early as the first century A.D. However the symbolic imagery of the novel, from its Jewish origins and relation to the Hellenistic Septuagint, was loaded with different senses throughout the ages. In section 3.4 I shall compare scenes of *J & A* with Porphyry's commentary on *The Cave of the Nymphs*. Porphyry's allegorical commentary is a philosophical interpretation of the verses that in the XIII book of the *Odyssey* describe the sacred grotto at Phorkys, the harbour of Ulysses' beloved Ithaca. The epic scene is fascinating and enigmatic in itself: at the end of his wanderings throughout foreign lands the hero is carried, still asleep, on the shore of his native

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[4] The analogy with a dialogue expresses the dynamics of exegetical texts such as *J & A*, which combine biblical narrative with the technique of a commentary on it. See Levinson (2004) for a clear deninition of exegesis in late antique rabbinical texts as compared to postbiblical narratives; in the re-writing process, authors both acknowledge and go further the canonical text, inferring from it additional content according to the cultural needs of their time. The readers' contribution to the life and development of texts is also central to construct the dynamics of narrative and interpretation.

island by the Phaeacian sailors who helped him to return home. The place is sacred, because in the cave next to the harbour the nymphs weave purple mantles on stone looms and collect the honey which bees lay in amphorae made of stone. The analogies of the honey-bees imagery in Porphyry's commentary and in *J & A* are useful for a better understanding of the message the anonymous author(s) of *J & A* intended to convey. While both literary works testify to the later reinterpretation and re-writing of authoritative texts that is, Homer and the Bible, points of contact can be detected in the complex religious sensibilities presented by Porphyry and the anonymous author(s) of *J & A*.

After having explored *J & A* as a Hellenistic novel and a commentary on Scripture, in section 3.5 I posit that *J & A* conveyed a Christian re-interpretation of the biblical text in the literary form of a novel retelling love and adventure. The medieval Christian reinterpretation of a pagan novel, Heliodorus' *Charicleia & Theagenes*, by the twelfth century monk Philagathos of Cerami, can be compared to *J & A* and its ethical-religious thrust throughout its reception. The author from Southern Italy is also known as 'Philip the Philosopher', interpreter of Heliodorus' novel. The tenth century lexicon of Souda and Socrates Ecclesiasticus presented Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus as converts to Christianity and bishops. Philagathos' Christian interpretation of a Greek novel in allegorical terms is however unique, and can be inscribed as a variant example in the genre of literary criticism/revisionism, which in the Hellenistic age had as its main focus the Homeric poems. The story of the heroine Charicleia is highlighted as an edifying model of virtue, and in much the same way the story of Aseneth inspired exemplary hagiographies that elevated the feminine. Therefore a known author, Philagathos of Cerami, can help us to unravel the anonymous intricate transmission and reception of *J & A*, a Jewish-Hellenistic novel that became an allegorical Christian story.

As a conclusion to the present journey throughout literary texts and contexts, I shall add in section 3.6 a few remarks about the significance of *J & A* as an allegorical novel. Indeed, while other adjectives may define *J & A*, for instance as a 'mystical', 'enigmatic' and 'symbolic' novel, as we have seen, the dimension of allegory describes most accurately the thrust and purposes of our novel both synchronically and diachronically. In fact, the rhetorical figure of allegory, which

allows authors to imply the real sense of their words, concealing it under the surface of the letter, testifies to a relation of *J & A* to the Hellenistic literary culture. Thus, the use of allegory and its cognate figures, such as personification, contribute to make *J & A* a text understandable by Greek speaking Jewish and pagan readers in the Hellenistic world. The extant texts of the novel, which are written in a religious formulaic language reminiscent of the Septuagint versions and the New Testament, may thus testify to the appropriation of the *J & A* tradition in various Christian environments. In this hypothesis, *J & A* in its present state represents the afterlife of a Jewish Hellenistic text which was inherited in monastic contexts as well as being transmitted to a wider audience in the Churches of the East, from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

3.2 Philostratus' dialogue *Heroikos* between Revision of Myth and Conversion.

Philostratus' dialogue *Heroikos* is a testimony of Homeric revisionism which combines literary fiction and philosophical interpretation of Hellenic myth and ritual. The exploration of thematic-rhetorical points of contact in the *Heroikos* and *J & A* may add to our understanding of the significance of the novel in the first centuries A.D. This analysis suggests a position for the Hellenistic Jewish *Joseph and Aseneth* in a world where both Jewish and Hellenic culture had to be preserved or re-established among philosophical-religious sensibilities and the rise of Christianity. The broader cultural significance of the *Heroikos* and *J & A* is therefore the most evident point of contact between the two texts. Although a cultural purpose is not spelled out in *J & A*, as it always remains 'between the lines' of the love-story, like the *Heroikos*, *J & A* assumes different senses diachronically. In addition, both texts represent the heroic past of the ancestors, at the same time celebrating and modifying remote ages according to the needs of contemporary culture.

Indeed, the *Heroikos* treats Hellenic myth and ritual as sacred material, attributing a mystical dimension to traditional religion. The dialogue is significantly set in the Thracian Chersonese and it takes place between a Phoenician trader and a native vinedresser. Central in the framework of the dialogue is the motif of belief in stories old and new. The Phoenician interlocutor's gradual belief in these stories is featured as a progressive conversion from a sceptical stance to absolute acceptance

of the good news he receives from his host. The time of the story is Philostratus' contemporary age or the recent historical past, whereas the mythical content of the *Heroikos* connects the ever-living cultural past of Hellas with the present world, thus attributing to Hellenic myth and ritual a diachronic value throughout the ages, which culminates in a timeless present.[5] The dialogue features a philosophical dimension, in which the vine-grower undertakes the role of a philosopher and his Phoenician guest complies with the function of a disciple. In the dialogue's dynamics the Phoenician sailor is at first inclined to listen to the vinedresser's account, learning from him yet not believing in the story; he changes his mind gradually about the knowledge which is being revealed. The vineyard itself is a sacred space, regularly visited and even permeated by the spirit of the hero Protesilaos, the young warrior who was the first to die on the land of Ilios at the time of the Trojan War.[6]

The *Heroikos*' philosophical-mystical dimension offers interesting material for thought which allows us to suggest a further interpretation of the religious-symbolic imagery and the purpose of the Hellenistic novel of *J & A*. If we look at the narrative framework of the dialogue, we shall see that the vinedresser declares himself to have been instructed by the lovely youth himself both in practical life for what concerns the keeping of the vineyard and in the real profound sense of the Homeric episodes and myth. To the Phoenician's initial objection that Protesilaos' premature death should have prevented him from knowing what happened next in the conflict, the vinedresser responds disclosing a mystical truth that is, the hero's supernatural foreknowledge was allowed when his soul was freed from the material burden of the body.[7] We know that Philostratus wrote his dialogue in the early third century A.D., possibly expanding on themes of the *Life of Apollonius*. In the dialogue, Philostratus asserts the value of Hellenic mythical traditions and rituals, by explaining and justifying them in relation to significant geographical locations.

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[5] Rutherford (2009) 237: '... Philostratus' pilgrimage tradition not only links two disparate geographical locations, but it also links different times, the mythical past and the present or recent historical past. It thus gives us a more-or-less continuous link between the time of the Trojan war and the present, transforming the mythical past into a sort of eternal present.'

[6] *Il.* 2.695-709; 13.681; 15.705; 16.286. The *Iliad* does not mention his killer, whereas later sources blame Hector, Aeneas, or Euphorbus.

[7] Phil., *Her.* 7.3: 'To be cleansed of the body is the beginning of life for divine and thus blessed souls'; this is a Platonic concept, as it is remarked in the note by Maclean-Aitken (2001) 19.

The sanctuary of Protesilaos in the Chersonesus, at Elaios on the Hellespont is indeed on a crucial route of communication between Greece and the Near East. From the mythical Trojan War to the Persian campaigns in the fifth century B.C. and the expansion of the Roman Empire at Philostratus' time, this area represented a knot of cultural exchange and conflict. In the Jewish tradition, Egypt was loaded with similarly ambivalent connotations, illustrating the alien land where the Hebrew ancestors were periodically returning in a climate of either tolerance or tension. On the narrative level, *J & A* justifies the marriage of the protagonists on the grounds of the biblical account which is expanded in a story of love, conversion and mystical-religious instruction conveyed through divine epiphany. One of the underlying purposes of the novel might have been to defend the presence and role of Jews in the Hellenized world, possibly in Egypt and/or Asia Minor and Syria, locations where Aseneth's story of love and mystical transformation is set and well received throughout the centuries. Consequently the city of Heliopolis in the novel represents the sacred space where hallowed mysteries take place, as well as the crossroads of cultures, the point of their encounter and communication. In the following analysis of the *Heroicus* and *J & A* mutual themes will emerge that is, the element of sweetness-grace connected with the mystical revelation of the truth, as well as the motif of joy and serenity transpiring from the setting in a *locus amoenus* which has its beneficial effects on the characters of the stories.

In the *Heroikos*, the vineyard constitutes a significant setting: all plants and trees produce plenty of fruits, so that both the inhabitant and the visitor of the land feel closer to the mythical golden age. As in a return to primitive wisdom, when human beings lived according to nature, the vinedresser shows his Phoenician interlocutor that his work in the field is fruitful while leading to a deeper knowledge rather than to the making of money. For this reason, fruits of the land are offered to the Phoenician guest, who starts experiencing a different outlook from the economic-cultural system of his world. While the Phoenician stranger is invited to accept cheerfully gifts of hospitality, initially he states his disbelief in the vinedresser's tale, although he demonstrates an interest in the story, adding that should he come to believe, the vinedresser would please the ancient heroes. A veiled parallelism is

noticeable between the pleasure the Phoenician guest will take from the fruits of the land and the heroes' rejoicing if he'll leave as a believer of their true story.
The vinedresser says that his guest will have to do nothing else than eating the fruits and enjoying them, so that he will leave satisfied:

> V.: Nothing other than to eat them with pleasure (ἡδέως), to be satisfied, and to go away rejoicing (χαίρων).[8]

In the Phoenician's response to the account of Protesilaos' spiritual presence, the vinedresser will make the heroes rejoice thanks to the knowledge which may persuade his guest to believe:

> PH.: I don't believe it, although I wish these things were so. (…) Indeed, you would please the heroes if I should go away believing.[9]

The analogy between the fruits of the vineyard and the knowledge which the vinedresser has learnt through observing the surroundings and listening to Protesilaos continues in the framework of the dialogue. When the Phoenician and the vinedresser decide to enter the vineyard, this is depicted as a sacred space which is infused with divine essence and where only well-inclined souls are accepted, whereas all evils and vices are kept at bay.

> V.: Let us enter the vineyard, Phoenician. For you may even discover in it something to cheer you. [10]

The Phoenician sailor repeats the exhortation to enter the vineyard, because a pleasant scent emanates from the plants:

> Φ.: Παρέλθωμεν· ἡδὺ γὰρ που ἀναπνεῖ τῶν φυτῶν.
> PH: Let us enter, for a scent that is, I suppose, pleasant comes from the plants.

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[8]*Her.* 2.5: Ἀ. : Τί δ' ἄλλο γε ἢ φαγεῖν τε ἡδέως καὶ ἐπισιτίσασθαι καὶ ἀπελθεῖν χαίρων;
[9]*Her.*, 3.1. Φ.: Ἀπιστῶ, … καίτοι οὕτω βουλόμενος ταῦτα ἔχειν (…) ἤδη δίελθέ μοι ταῦτά τε καὶ ὅσα τοῦ Πρωτεσίλεω γινώσκεις· καὶ γὰρ ἂν χαρίζοιο τοῖς ἥρωσιν, εἰ πιστεύων ἀπέλθοιμι.
[10]*Her.*, 3.2: Ἀ.: Παρέλθωμεν εἰς τὸν ἀμπελῶνα, ὦ Φοῖνιξ, καὶ γὰρ ἂν καὶ εὐφροσύνης τι ἐν αὐτῷ εὕροις.

As the vinedresser remarks, the scent is not only pleasant, but divine (θεῖον); even the walkaways are sacred, because the hero Protesilaos exercises in them. The vineyard is thus depicted as an enclosed space, almost bounded by a supernatural force which keeps wild, dangerous beasts outside; the language shifts deftly to metaphorical association when unscrupulous human types are classified as the actual beasts:

> V.: You speak the truth. No beast is allowed to enter the premises. No serpent, or poisonous spider, or extortionist attacks us here in the field. This last beast is exceedingly shameless; it even kills in the marketplace. [11]

The metaphor in the above passage establishes a preliminary implicit contrast between the town and the countryside as two opposite dimensions, the former subject to vices and violence, the latter still peaceful and propitious for speculation, wisdom and a blessed way of life. To the Phoenician's observation that the vinedresser is speaking with accurate rhetorical skills, like an educated man, the sage starts an account of his past experience in the city; he had to take over the keeping of the vineyard for financial hardship, and he pleaded Protesilaos for assistance. At first the hero remained silent (ἐσιώπα) out of resentment towards the vinedresser who had formerly betrayed the place and his origins moving to town. However later on Protesilaos did not bear to remain insensitive to the vinedresser's plight, so that he answered at first with the injunction for the man to change his dress (μεταμφίασαι); if interpreted, the advice means to change one's status, identity and ultimately one's own mind and life.[12] Subsequently, the hero made all plants and fruits grow in the land; the vinedresser even started to consult Protesilaos as a physician whenever a disease struck his animals.

Thus the vinedresser has acquired wisdom through his work in the vineyard according to Protesilaos' instruction and is proud of his life. While the Phoenician guest starts making sense of his presages during the journey towards the Chersonese, the wise man encourages him to ask for more information. In the ensuing simile, the Phoenician is compared to Odysseus, when the hero was at a loss in Circe's island and rescued by Hermes who gave him the *moly*, the magical plant used as antidote to

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[11] *Her.*, 4.4.
[12] *Her.*, 4.6-10.

the enchantress' drugs. The vinedresser will undertake by association the role of Hermes or 'one of his wise followers', thanks to Protesilaos' intermediary role.

> Ask whatever you wish, my guest, and you will not say that you came in vain. For when Odysseus, far from his ship, was perplexed, Hermes, or one of his clever followers, had an earnest conversation with him (the subject was probably the *moly*). And Protesilaos by means of me will fill you with information and make you more content and wise. For knowing many things is worth much.[13]

The narrative pattern of Aseneth's initial disbelief which is followed by her conversion in the novel of *J & A* is devised by means of similar motifs and rhetorical features. Points of contact with the *Heroikos* indicate that the biblical love-story, although it is written in a Greek strongly influenced by the Septuagint translation(s), was constructed as a Hellenistic text. The blending of Jewish concepts-expressions and Graeco-Roman imagery in *J & A* creates a polyphony of senses rendering a complex portrayal of the poly-cultural Hellenistic world. An apparently repetitive and conventional imagery in *J & A* reveals a deeper significance. Moreover, the plurality of senses which is created by the novel's rarefied setting and mystical scenes cannot be connected to a specific religious ritual. As Ian Rutherford has argued, it is possible to define Philostratus' *Heroikos* as an 'inter-ritual' text, because it connects myths and rituals of different geographical areas and distant times. In much the same way, *J & A* can be considered as an inter-cultural text because its fiction connects potentially different cultures, both at the time of its supposed early composition and circulation and throughout the ages. This process was made possible by the literary devices embedded in the novel that is, its symbolic-mystical imagery, its references to inter-texts and the allegorical discourse which is open to various interpretations.

If we consider the emblematic imagery of *J & A*, we can see parallels with philosophical texts that convey profound senses by means of allegory and its cognate rhetorical figures. The courtyard surrounding Pentephres' palace and Aseneth's tower is described as a sheltered space, which is protected by a majestic wall; the stones composing the wall are massive and square. This picture of Heliopolis as a stronghold is completed with the addition of four doors made of iron and watched all

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[13] *Her.*, 6.1.

the time by eighteen young soldiers. The description connotes the land of Heliopolis as an enclosure. This picture is confirmed in the scene of Joseph's arrival: the walls represent a boundary which only elected people are allowed to cross, whereas strangers are kept outside. The map of the wall is round, while the square stones composing it may be symbolic, if they hint at the safety and steadiness guaranteed within the walls of Heliopolis. In addition, square stones may recall the *Hermai*, statues representing Hermes, emblems of fortuitous findings and guides for the travellers at crossroads, as well as figures of firm reason.[14] The description of nature inside the walls of Heliopolis contrasts with the bare heaviness of stones and iron: all the trees are in blossom or bearing plenty of fruit, because it is the time of harvest. The spring of living water irrigating the courtyard makes the sheltered oasis a paradise on earth.[15]

> There was a large courtyard which surrounded the house, and the wall around the courtyard was very high, built of huge square stones. And there were four doors (around) the courtyard, made of iron, and eighteen strong youths in arms guarded them. And inside the courtyard besides the wall trees had grown, (and they were) all seasonal, varied and bearing fruits. Their fruits were ripe, because it was the season of harvest. And in the courtyard from the right side there was a spring of abundant living water and underneath the spring a large cistern which gathered the water of the spring. There, a river flowed amid the courtyard and watered all the plants of the courtyard (καὶ ἐπότιζε πάντα τὰ δένδρα τῆς αὐλῆς ἐκείνης).[16]

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[14]As we have seen, in the *Tabula Cebetis* the hypostasis of Paideia stands on a solid square rock, and it is possible to enumerate a series of images-similes combining the figure of the square and the number four with sound stability and the four cardinal virtues. The canonical four cardinal virtues in Western ethics come from the ancient philosophical tradition; Plato discusses virtue especially in the dialogues *Protagoras* and *Meno*, while Aristotle in the *Ethica Nichomachea* argues that virtues are the means between extremes. Seven virtues will be codified in Christian theology, but an early introduction to the topic is found in St. Paul's first letter to the *Corinthians*, 13.13. For the image of the square as emblematic of moral strength and endurance, cf. Dante, Par., xvii: 'dette mi fuor di mia vita futura parole gravi,/ avvegna ch'io mi senta/ ben tetragono ai colpi di ventura'.

[15]In *Her.*, 3.1, when the Phoenician sailor asks the vinedresser to tell him the story about Protesilaos, although he does not believe it, he adds politely the condition that he is not preventing his host from his duties in the vineyard; the vinedresser replies: 'Stranger, the plants no longer need watering at midday, since it is already late autumn and the season itself waters them' (3.2). Although these details are realistic, they add a symbolic value to the text; in Hellenic culture, midday is the crucial time for encounters with divinities, heroes and demons. In *J & A*, Joseph stops in Heliopolis at midday; cf. Protesilaos' epiphany while the vinedresser is hunting and falling asleep at midday in *Her.*, 11.7.

[16]*J & A*, 2. 10-12: καὶ ἦν αὐλὴ μεγάλη παρακειμένη τῇ οἰκίᾳ κυκλόθεν καὶ ἦν τεῖχος κύκλῳ τῆς αὐλῆς ὑψηλὸν σφόδρα λίθοις τετραγώνοις μεγάλοις ᾠκοδομημένον. καὶ ἦσαν πύλαι τῇ αὐλῇ τέσσαρες σεσιδηρωμέναι καὶ ταύτας ἐφύλαττον ἀνὰ δεκαοκτὼ

The time of the story in *J & A* is the remote biblical past converted in an ever-living present, while momentous events are defined with specific chronological indicators. It is in fact noteworthy that the passage depicting Joseph's arrival in the territory of Heliopolis highlights the significance of numeric markers by means of repetition. Thus, Joseph arrives to Heliopolis in the time of plenty while he is gathering crops in prevision of the time of dearth, and it is the fourth month, we may suppose in an imaginary square figure of chronological perfection, on the eighteenth day of the month, as eighteen are the young soldiers at the doors of Heliopolis.

> And it happened in the first year of the seven years of plenty in the fourth month on the eighteenth day of the month: Joseph came to the boundaries of Heliopolis and he was collecting the food of the period of plenty from that region.[17]

As in the *Heroikos*, the landscape of the novel is in communication with the divine presence, exerting an influence on its inhabitants. It is thus possible to suggest that in *J & A* space, memorable events and characters are subtly connected. For instance Aseneth bears the same number eighteen in her age, as if she were in mystical correspondence with the landscape. Moreover, she takes part in the blossoming and ripening of the courtyard while getting ready to receive Joseph. Indeed, as Sabrina Inowlocki has remarked, the adjective that compares Aseneth to Rebecca, ὡραία, is associated with beauty as well as with maturity. The ripeness of fruits in the surrounding landscape stands for Aseneth's readiness to recognize Joseph as the elect of God and to become his wife.[18] Therefore, the heroine is connected to the significant setting, so that her change of heart is illustrated by the picture of abundant fruits.

ἄνδρες δυνατοὶ νεανίσκοι ἔνοπλοι. καὶ ἦσαν πεφυτευμένα ἐντὸς τῆς αὐλῆς παρὰ τὸ τεῖχος δένδρα ὡραῖα παντοδαπὰ καὶ καρποφόρα πάντα. καὶ ἦν ὁ καρπὸς αὐτῶν πέπειρος, ὥρα γὰρ ἦν θερισμοῦ. καὶ ἦν ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ ἐκ δεξιῶν πηγὴ ὕδατος πλουσίου ζῶντος καὶ ὑποκάτωθεν τῆς πηγῆς ἦν ληνὸς μεγάλη δεχομένη τὸ ὕδωρ τῆς πηγῆς ἐκείνης. ἔνθα ἐπορεύετο ποταμὸς διὰ μέσης τῆς αὐλῆς καὶ ἐπότιζε πάντα τὰ δένδρα τῆς αὐλῆς ἐκείνης·

[17] *J & A*, 3.1: καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ ἔτει τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐτῶν τῆς εὐθηνίας ἐν τῷ τετάρτῳ μηνὶ ὀκτωκαιδεκάτῃ τοῦ μηνὸς ἦλθεν Ἰωσὴφ εἰς τὰ ὅρια Ἡλιουπόλεως καὶ ἦν συνάγων τὸν σῖτον τῆς εὐθηνίας τῆς χώρας ἐκείνης.

[18] Cf. *J & A*, 1.5. See Inowlocki (2002) 159, n. 492.

The man from heaven represents a divine envoy as well as the figure of an instructor for Aseneth and implicitly for the reader. The theme of a passage from doubt and despair to belief that brings happiness reflected in the prosperity of the setting recurs both in *J & A* and in the *Heroikos*. The Phoenician sailor starts recognizing that Protesilaos came back to life in that land because he can observe the beauty and hallowed aura that permeates the surroundings.

> PH.: … this portion of the land seems to me to be most pleasant and divine (ἥδιστόν… θεῖον). I do not know whether anyone has ever come to life again here, but if someone were to, he would live, I suppose, most pleasantly and painlessly after coming from the throng of battle. [19]

In *J & A*, the man from heaven is described as Joseph's spiritual counterpart, a figure made of light which has descended from heaven like a falling star. The divine envoy mentions a few elements of the heavenly dimension, such as the rank of God and the place where Aseneth will dwell forever as a City of Refuge for all those who repent, finding their place of rest in heaven.[20] In the *Heroikos* memory of the remote past guarantees eternal life to ancient heroes and consequently to Hellenic culture, so that Protesilaos continues to live and converse with the vinedresser at Philostratus' time. Like Philostratus' contemporaries, the Phoenician sailor has to be converted that is, re-educated to this knowledge of the true story. Analogous senses can be detected in the Jewish-Hellenistic novel of *J & A*, which features the themes of coming-into-existence from the divine world,[21] change of heart and mystical transformation. Indeed, the remote biblical past is evoked and reinvented in order to convey the true senses of the word of God as well as the purposes of Jewish lore in the poly-cultural Hellenistic world.

If we now turn to the aforementioned motif of sweetness, we shall see that elements of charm, hinting at a sublimated/spiritual conception of love characterize both Protesilaos the ancient hero and the man from heaven in *J & A*. Divine beings and their human disciples interact with gestures and words that compose a nearly erotic portrayal. In fact, the vinedresser explains how he can embrace Protesilaos and

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[19] *Her.*, 5.2.

[20] *J & A*, 14.8; 15.4-7

[21] *J & A*, 16.11. When the honeycomb is found in her room, Aseneth understands that her heavenly interlocutor has called it into being with his word.

cling to the neck of the lovely youth. The vinedresser replies to the Phoenician sailor's question about the physical nature of the hero that is, if it is possible to touch and embrace him or if he is like a shade, as apparitions of the dead in Homer are compared to smoke:

> V.: He (Protesilaos) enjoys my embrace and allows me to kiss him and cling to his neck. (…) When someone is garlanded, he makes the flowers even sweeter, whenever he is around them.[22]

In *J & A*, the divine envoy's words are connected to the pleasant scent emanating from the honeycomb, which illustrates the effect of the divine spirit The first details Aseneth notices in the apparition are the same attributes which Joseph bears to represent holiness and royalty. Therefore, superior instruction passes trough the human senses, especially sight, but also perception of divine scent indicating a supernatural presence:

> (Aseneth): Lord I have never had a honeycomb in my room, but you spoke and it has come into being. Has this not come from your mouth, because the breath of the honeycomb is like the breath of your mouth?[23]

In addition, the heavenly messenger's speeches and gestures are significant. Like Joseph raises his right hand on Aseneth's head while pronouncing the prayer of blessing for her conversion and mystical transformation, the man from heaven similarly uses his right hand to commend Aseneth for her understanding.[24] The confirmatory miracle of the honeycomb and bees contains complex senses: by their falling to the ground dead after having attempted to harm Aseneth and their coming back into life at the man from heaven's command, the bees seem to illustrate the pattern of moral wreck, conversion and coming back to a new life.[25] The scene may be loaded with an eschatological sense, thus representing the death of the body and the resurrection of the soul, as Christian readers of *J & A* were likely to understand in subsequent cultural environments.

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[22]*Her.*, 11.2-3.
[23]*J & A*, 16.11: Κύριε ἐγὼ οὐκ εἶχον κηρίον μέλιτος ἐν τῷ ταμιείῳ μου πώποτε ἀλλὰ σὺ ἐλάλησας καὶ γέγονε. Μήτιγε τοῦτο ἐκ τοῦ στόματός σού ἐξῆλθε διότι ἡ πνοὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς πνοὴ τοῦ στόματός σού ἐστιν;
[24]*J & A*, 16.12.
[25]*J & A*, 16.22-23.

This survey of significant places in the *Heroikos* and *J & A* has hopefully supported my proposal that the novel plays with various literary sources and intertexts that is, not only the biblical episodes, but also pagan Hellenistic fiction, such as erudite commentaries dealing with ancient myth and ritual. Thus, *J & A* is a plain popular story only on the surface of its literary fiction; symbolic-mystical imagery and the presence of a coherent design in the novel reveal a more complex text, dense with underlying philosophical-religious significance. The difficulty of pinning down a definite cultural context for *J & A* is explained by the co-existence of values, motifs and themes shared both by Jews and by their pagan contemporaries. Indeed, *J & A* might have been composed in a Hellenistic Jewish environment with the purpose of reaching several audiences at different layers of society. The Septuagint and postbiblical religious texts offered the linguistic ground to make a wide diffusion of the tradition possible, although the sense of *J & A* is complex like intellectual Jewish-Christian exegesis. Therefore, *J & A* assumed a different significance according to the cultural milieu of its reception from an educated Jewish Hellenistic environment to Christian audiences.

3.3 Dio's oration 61 on Chryseïs or, how to read the Homeric Silence, and the Motif of Allegorical Speech as opposed to Silence in *J & A*.

The motif of silence is featured in the novel of *J & A* as a narrative strategy that highlights pregnant words and the use of speech. Sabrina Inowlocki has argued that speech creates a framework in which Aseneth's femininity is connoted.[26] By uttering her negative speech against Joseph and challenging her father's authority, Aseneth plays the role of the strange woman; as the story progresses, the heroine undergoes an exemplary change of heart, becoming the emblem of wisdom through the words she delivers. Initially during her ritual of repentance Aseneth practices gestures of mourning and laments without articulating words.[27] When she pronounces her confession to the God of Joseph, her first two soliloquies are still silent, only

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[26]Inowlocki (2004).

[27]*J & A*, 11.2: καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς ἐνέβαλεν εἰς τὸν κόλπον αὐτῆς πλέξασα τοὺς δακτύλους αὐτῆς τῶν χειρῶν ἐπὶ τὸ γόνυ τὸ δεξιὸν καὶ τὸ στόμα αὐτῆς ἦν κεκλεισμένον καὶ οὐκ ἤνοιξεν αὐτὸ ἐν ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἡμέραις καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἑπτὰ νυξὶ τῆς ταπεινώσεως αὐτῆς.

formulated 'in her heart'[28], the former because she is too exhausted to speak aloud, and the latter because she does not dare to open her mouth to address God.[29] The rhetorical device of silence as complementary to speech is a sophisticated literary strategy exemplified in Hellenistic texts. In the following paragraphs, I shall compare the relevant passages of *J & A* where the themes of the divine word and mystical discourse emerge as an embedded narrative strategy with a Homeric oration by the learned intellectual Dio of Prusa. The comparison between a Jewish Hellenistic narrative and an example of Homeric criticism aims to point out the complex rhetorical devices used in *J & A*.

Dio of Prusa, rhetorician and philosopher of the late first century A.D. (ca. 40-115), dedicated several of his discourses to Homeric criticism. Dio's thrust is either to demonstrate that events recounted in the Homeric epics followed a different course from what is usually believed or that Homeric heroes acted with more profound aims than what is plainly stated. For instance, Dio argues in Oration 11 that the outcome of the Trojan War was the reverse of what was believed in the common opinion that is, the Trojans actually won the conflict, while in the Oration 57 he aims to defend Nestor from the slander of being boastful. As Lawrence Kim has argued, Dio assumes a versatile literary persona, that of the philosopher pursuing a path towards wisdom and virtue against the mainstream, the opinion (δόξα) of the masses. Consequently, Dio privileges most unusual, difficult readings of the Homeric text, thus presenting a version of the tradition which is literally παρὰ δόξαν that is, against the common opinion.

Oration 61 focuses on Chryseïs, the daughter of Apollo's priest in the *Iliad*; the work stands out even in Dio's corpus for its unusual topic, dealing with a less known female character and involving a female interlocutor in the frame of the dialogue with Dio's persona. The kernel of the oration is to demonstrate that during the tenth year of the Trojan War Chryseïs was still living with Agamemnon, but she enacted

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[28] *J & A*, 11.3: καὶ εἶπεν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς τὸ στόμα μὴ ἀνοίξασα…

[29] *J & A*, 11.15: καὶ ἐφοβήθη ἀνοίξαι τὸ στόμα αὐτῆς καὶ ὀνομάσαι τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ. However, during the second monologue, Aseneth decides to rely on God's forgiveness so that she can continue her prayer aloud, this time enumerating God's prerogatives of Creator and means of life. *J & A*, 11.18-19: Τολμήσω οὖν ἀνοίξαι τὸ στόμα μου πρὸς αὐτόν… καὶ ἤνοιξε τὸ στόμα αὐτῆς πρὸς τὸν θεὸν…

the change of her condition summoning her father to the Achaean army to ransom her. The Homeric text does not state explicitly that Chryseïs managed to change the course of the events, and here is when a reading 'between the lines' becomes necessary. Dio explains as a teacher/philosophical guide to his sceptical interlocutor that it is possible to infer the truth from the events narrated and from the behaviour of the characters. In fact, to the objection that Chryseïs seemed to wait for too long before wishing to return home, Dio responds that she had been formerly happy with the chieftain of the Achaeans, however at the time of the events narrated in the first book of the *Iliad*, she was sensible enough to plan a change of her position. Indeed, she must have sensed that Troy was bound to be taken soon, and her destiny would have been to follow the victorious general in Argos, where she would be a foreign slave and exposed to the cruelty and revenge of the legitimate wife, Clytemnestra. Although Chryseïs' foreboding thoughts are not made explicit, what happens next can be read as a confirmation of her insight: Agamemnon shows boastfulness and impiety, as he treats her father, a minister of Apollo, with disrespect, while even disparaging his own wife in public as well as speaking insulting words of Chryseïs herself.[30]

Chryseïs' silence may subtly illustrate the programmatic silence which is devised by Homer. In fact, like Chryseïs secures the positive outcome of her decision by planning a secret strategy, so the poet leaves the mechanisms that trigger the events narrated 'concealed' behind the story-line. The female interlocutor asks the Dio-persona:

> What other proof (ἀπόδειξιν) do you have in Homer about Chryseïs' character? He (Homer) has depicted her doing or saying nothing, but only being given silently (σιγῇ) to her father.[31]

Thus, Chryseïs' silence indicates her awareness of the truth and her wise choice, rather than qualifying her as a passive character slipping away and leaving few traces of her presence. As the story proceeds, Chryseïs proves to be a clever young woman who ultimately obtains what she wants and is actually best for her, while Agamemnon not only is about to lose his companion, but also provokes Apollo's

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[30]Cf. *Il.* 1.29-31, quoted in Dio, *or.* 61.14.
[31]Dio, or. 61. 3. Cf. Kim (2008) 605.

terrible wrath, because the god sends a plague among the Achaean army to avenge his priest. Moreover, it is clear that according to the heroic ethics Agamemnon fails in his duties as a general, causing Achilles to withdraw from battle after depriving the hero of Bryseïs.

On the plane of literary criticism, Dio tries to lead his interlocutor along his side, stating that if she recognizes Homer's wisdom (λέγεις δὴ σοφὸν ὄντα τὸν Ὅμηρον, 'you say that Homer is wise/skilled' § 8), she will be able to acknowledge that Homer decided to convey part of his knowledge explicitly, while leaving essential information for those able to perceive it (... τὰ μὲν αὐτὸν λέγειν οἷου, τὰ δὲ τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσι καταλιπεῖν αἰσθάνεσθαι, 'he thinks appropriate to say some facts, while leaving other ones for those who happen to understand them'). In fact, Homer's strategy involves things 'passed under silence', left implicit for the audience to grasp. This technique was codified in ancient literary criticism as the rhetorical 'figure of silence', σχῆμα σιωπήσεως. In the Homeric orations, Dio argues that Homer's silence is purposeful, because nothing has been devised by chance or simply for the sake of poetic fiction. In this interpretation, Chryseïs' silence may illustrate both Homer's interpretative technique and the feats which are expected from his readers. The singular dialogical form of Oration 61 remarks the 'interpretative challenge' which is being laid down.

Turning to the analysis of the silence/speech motif in *J & A*, it is noteworthy that vocabulary highlights the function of significant words especially in the description of the announcement scene. The words pronounced by the angel convey mystical knowledge that is, the description of the place in heaven for the virtue of Repentance and for Aseneth after her transformation in a City of Refuge. In this context, words are a positive instrument, the verbalization of the ineffable mysteries of God, converted into articulated speech accessible to human beings. Aseneth has acquired the faculty to speak sacred words in her confession and prayers, so that she has been heard by God (1). The man from heaven promises to pass to Joseph his words about Aseneth, in order to inform him about Aseneth's blessed status on his return to Heliopolis (2); this narrative strategy increases the pace of the events, highlighting important concepts. Ultimately Aseneth's speech (3) combines

ῥήματα, the words of the divine envoy, and the verb λαλέω, which is referred to Aseneth's possibility to speak, thus acknowledging the importance of the divine message as well as pointing out that Aseneth as a saint virgin has been set free to express a valuable point of view, didactic for the reader and exegete. The following quotations exemplify the concept of the words (ῥήματα) and of speaking (λαλέω) as equated to significant imagery, thus pointing out that the narrative represents sacred discourse.

> 1) And the man said to her: 'Courage, Aseneth, and do not be afraid, but get up and stand on your feet and I shall speak to you my words (λαλήσω πρὸς σὲ τὰ ῥήματά μου…) Then come to me and I shall speak to you my words (καὶ λαλήσω πρός σε τὰ ῥήματά μου).' [32]
> 2) Courage, Aseneth, saint virgin. Here I have heard all the words (ἀκήκοα πάντων τῶν ῥημάτων) of your confession and of your prayer.[33]
> And now I shall go to Joseph and tell him all my words about you (πάντα τὰ ῥήματά μου).[34]
> 3) And Aseneth said: 'If I have found favour in front of you, lord, and I shall know that you will accomplish all your words (πάντα τὰ ῥήματά σου) which you have told me, may your servant speak (λαλησάτο δὴ ἡ παιδίσκη) in front of you'. And the man said to her: 'Speak' (λάλησον).[35]

Inowlocki has discussed the dialogical passages which in the second part of the novel reveal Aseneth's superior wisdom that is, when she prays to God to be rescued from Dan and Gad's swords and she appeases their angry brothers because 'for no reason evil should be repaid for evil'. Aseneth's story is instructive to convey an ethical outlook. Thus, the literary choice to make Aseneth, a less known biblical character, the protagonist of a didactic love-story allows the reader to view the biblical tradition from a different angle. The purpose of interpreting an authoritative

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[32] *J & A*, 14.11-13: καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος· »θάρσει Ἀσενὲθ καὶ μὴ φοβηθῇς ἀλλ' ἀνάστηθι καὶ στῆθι ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας σου καὶ λαλήσω πρὸς σὲ τὰ ῥήματά μου «. (…)καὶ ἐλθὲ πρός με καὶ λαλήσω πρός σε τὰ ῥήματά μου. «

[33] *J & A*, 15.2: θάρσει Ἀσενὲθ ἡ παρθένος ἁγνή. ἰδοὺ ἀκήκοα πάντων τῶν ῥημάτων τῆς ἐξομολογήσεώς σου καὶ τῆς προσευχῆς σου.

[34] *J & A*, 15.9: καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀπέρχομαι πρὸς Ἰωσὴφ καὶ λαλήσω αὐτῷ περὶ σοῦ πάντα τὰ ῥήματά μου.

[35] *J & A*, 15.13-14: καὶ εἶπεν Ἀσενὲθ· »εἰ εὗρον χάριν ἐνώπιόν σου κύριε καὶ γνώσομαι ὅτι ποιήσεις πάντα τὰ ῥήματά σου ὅσα εἶπας πρός με λαλησάτο δὴ ἡ παιδίσκη σου ἐνώπιόν σου«. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος· »λάλησον«.

text through the lens of contemporary cultural needs brings *J & A* close to texts of Homeric revisionism, such as Dio's oration on Chryseïs. In both texts, a female protagonist illustrates the function of a reasoned speech or significant silence. Indeed, Dio interprets Chryseïs' story as a significant example of the Homeric technique to pass under silence part of the information, thus creating the underlying sense, which is left for the reader to discover. In much the same way, through her change of heart, which is expressed in her soliloquies and prayers, Aseneth guides the audience towards the deeper religious-mystical senses of the story. The plurality of senses in *J & A* reveals therefore a complex text devised to convey theoretical notions in allegorical imagery. The philosophical-religious depth of *J & A* allows us to inscribe this apparently plain novella in the literary-cultural context of Jewish exegesis.

In order to present further evidence for the intellectual background of *J & A*, I shall explore the theme of silence as contrasted to speech according to our best known exponent of the Jewish-Hellenistic thought. Philo of Alexandria interprets human silence as the necessary condition to hear the sacred word of the oracles. Starting from biblical exhortations, Philo conveys philosophical-religious exegesis on the themes of speech and listening. In the treatise *Who is the Heir of Divine Things*, the injunction from Deuteronomy 'Be silent and hear' (σιώπα καὶ ἄκουε)[36] is regarded as an omen, as human beings are exhorted to keep silence and listen not only with their physical sense, but with their soul. In fact, only by keeping quiet disparate voices in the mind, such as practical thoughts and memories, the wise man will be able to devote complete attention to the voice of God, as Moses commands.[37] However, whereas the ignorant ought to keep quiet, as Philo's argument goes, those who long for knowledge and love God, their master, possess freedom of speech: 'indeed being quiet is appropriate (συμφέρον ἡσυχία) for the ignorant (τοῖς... ἀμαθέσι), whereas for those who long for knowledge (τοῖς... ἐπιστήμης ἐφιεμένοις) and at the same time love their master (φιλοδεσπότοις) freedom of

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[36] *Deut.*, 27.9.
[37] Philo, *Who is the heir of divine things (Quis Her.)*, 10-13.

speech is a most necessary possession (ἀναγκαιότατον ἡ παρρησία κτῆμα)'.[38] The confirmatory quotation which Philo finds in Exodus, 'The Lord will fight for you, and you shall be silent', κύριος πολεμήσει ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, καὶ ὑμεῖς σιγήσετε, has an interesting parallel in the second part of *J & A*, when Joseph's brothers recognize that clearly God is fighting against them and the son of Pharaoh to rescue Aseneth and Joseph. On her part, Aseneth only pronounces words of wisdom and forgiveness, while her invocation to the Lord makes the swords of Dan and Gad disintegrate into ashes. Significantly, the prodigious event of the melting swords is defined a ῥῆμα, like the miracle of the honeycomb and bees in the man from heaven's speech.

> And the sons of Balla and Zelpha saw this great event (τὸ ῥῆμα τὸ μέγα) and were very frightened and said: 'The Lord is fighting against us for Aseneth (κύριος πολεμεῖ καθ' ἡμῶν ὑπὲρ Ἀσενέθ)'.[39]

Moreover, in the confrontation between Simeon and Levi, the strong and wise brothers, and the son of Pharaoh, Levi 'speaks with freedom, a still expression and mildness', μετὰ παρρησίας καὶ ἱλαρῷ προσώπῳ … ἐν πραότητι καρδίας[40], like a wise philosopher to a tyrant.[41] Indeed, Levi is a prophet who can read the tablets written in heaven and reveal unutterable mysteries to Aseneth in secret; Aseneth loves him more than all of Joseph's brothers, because she has now become a saint woman able to recognize wisdom and the word of God. Levi's portrayal is thus reminiscent of the wise man loving God, his master, in Philo's description.

> καὶ ἐκράτησεν Ἀσενὲθ τὴν χεῖρα τοῦ Λευί· καὶ ἠγάπησεν Ἀσενὲθ τὸν Λευὶ σφόδρα ὑπὲρ πάντας τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς Ἰωσήφ, ὅτι ἦν προσκείμενος κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἦν ἀνὴρ συνίων καὶ προφήτης ὑψίστου καὶ ὀξέως βλέπων τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ· καὶ αὐτὸς ἑώρα

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[38] *Quis Her.*, 14: τοῖς μὲν οὖν ἀμαθέσι συμφέρον ἡσυχία, τοῖς δὲ ἐπιστήμης ἐφιεμένοις καὶ ἅμα φιλοδεσπότοις ἀναγκαιότατον ἡ παρρησία κτῆμα.

[39] *J & A*, 28.1: Καὶ εἶδον οἱ υἱοὶ Βάλλας καὶ Ζέλφας τὸ ῥῆμα τὸ μέγα τοῦτο καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα καὶ εἶπον· »κύριος πολεμεῖ καθ' ἡμῶν ὑπὲρ Ἀσενέθ«.

[40] *J & A*, 23.10.

[41] See Whitmarsh (2011, forthcoming) for the remark that every Hellenist can read the episode as a confrontation between a philosopher and a tyrant; according to Whitmarsh, the two brothers embody the masculine Jewish vigour and wisdom.

γράμματα γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ... καὶ ἀπεκάλυπτε πάντα τῇ Ἀσενὲθ κρυφῇ, διότι καὶ αὐτὸς Λευὶς ἠγάπα τὴν Ἀσενὲθ πάνυ καὶ ἐώρα τὸν τόπον τῆς καταπαύσεως αὐτῆς ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις... [42]

In the treatise about dreams which are sent by God, Philo mentions the same passage from Deuteronomy, 'Be silent, and hear', referring to Moses' encounter with God in front of the burning bush.[43] Moses is qualified as a friend of God, and for this reason he is called by name twice; this mode to represent the divine being addressing a human seer is followed in *J & A*.[44] If we explore the second book of the same treatise, we shall notice that Philo analyses the sense of words in the interpretation of biblical dreams that became part of the Jewish narrative tradition and imagery. Thus, Philo points out that when Pharaoh starts retelling his dream of the seven cows, he uses the expression 'I thought I was standing by the edge of the river..., 'ᾤμην ἑστάναι παρὰ τὸ χεῖλος τοῦ ποταμοῦ'[45], without realising that he arrogates for himself the prerogative of being stable and unswerving, only appropriate for God and His friends. The immutability of God is reflected in the cosmos, while the sacred oracles are trustworthy witnesses to the truth: οἱ ἀψευδέστατοι μάρτυρες ἱεροὶ χρησμοί.[46] Philo interprets the river in Pharaoh's dream as a symbolic image to indicate speech flowing like water and producing either useful or disastrous effects: 'this (*sc.* speech) is like a river. But the nature of speech is twofold, the one is positive, the other is negative, and the positive one is helpful, whereas the negative one is inevitably harmful.'[47] The archetype of this simile is seen by Philo in the description of the river of Eden, which parts into four streams to water the garden: 'a river (...) flows from Eden to water the garden: from there it is divided in four branches'. Eden signifies 'delight', because those who can see and understand the wisdom of God will find pleasure in it: '(*sc.* Moses) calls the wisdom of the Existent Eden, which is by interpretation 'delight', because, I believe, wisdom is a pleasure to

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[42] *J & A*, 22.13.
[43] *Ex.*, 3.4.
[44] Philo, *On dreams*, *Somn.*, 1.193; cf. *J & A*, 14.4.
[45] Gen., 41.17; literally, as Philo will explain, it is 'the lip' of the river.
[46] *Somn.*, 2.216-220.
[47] *Somn.*, 2.240-241: οὗτος μὲν εἰκάζεται ποταμῷ. διττὴ δὲ λόγου φύσις, ἡ μὲν ἀμείνων, ἡ δὲ χείρων, ἀμείνων μὲν ἡ ὠφελοῦσα, χείρων δὲ κατὰ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον ἡ βλάπτουσα.

God and God to wisdom'.[48] The same imagery which Philo reinterprets from the description of Eden in Genesis seems to be re-elaborated in *J & A* so that a stream flowing from a 'spring of living water' irrigates the courtyard of Heliopolis,[49] whereas the παράδεισος τῆς τρυφῆς is presented as a holy place in heaven in the divine messenger's words. The holy honeycomb has been made by heavenly bees in the 'garden of delight', and it conveys life forever. The passage from the novel is worth quoting in full because it contains the important concepts of 'breath/spirit of life' and of 'life throughout the ages' in the name of God the Most High. The divine nourishment is presented as a means of salvation for the blessed, elected part of humanity and spiritual creatures.

> … Indeed this honeycomb is breath of life. In fact it has been made by the bees of the garden of delight (of God) from the dew of the roses of life and all the flowers which are in the garden of God. Therefore all the angels of God eat of it and all the elected of God and all the sons of the Most High, because this is a comb of life and everyone, who will eat from it, will not die forever.[50]

Therefore the interpretation which Philo adds to the image of the 'edge/lip of the river' in Pharaoh's dream constitutes a point of contact with the allegorical imagery of *J & A*. In fact, Philo considers the lip of the river as a metaphor that stands for human lips, the physical boundary with the faculty to allow or hinder language. The river of Egypt, where the Pharaoh dreamed to stand, represents material needs and negative passions[51] so that the function of the lips is to keep silence. Philo refers to the plagues which God sent to punish the Egyptians at Moses' time and which affected the water of the Nile.[52] Interestingly, fish are interpreted as thoughts and ideas which die in the water of the river that is in 'undisciplined speech'

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[48] *Somn.*, 2.242: ποταμὸς (…) πορεύεται ἐξ Ἐδὲμ ποτίζειν τὸν παράδεισον· ἐκεῖθεν ἀφορίζεται εἰς τέσσαρας ἀρχάς (…) καλεῖ δὲ τὴν μὲν τοῦ ὄντος σοφίαν Ἐδὲμ, ἧς ἑρμηνεία τρυφή, διότι, οἶμαι, ἐντρύφημα καὶ θεοῦ σοφία καὶ σοφίας θεός…

[49] Gen., 2.10; *J & A*, 2.10-12.

[50] *J & A*, 16.14: … διότι τοῦτο τὸ κηρίον ἐστὶ πνεῦμα ζωῆς. καὶ τοῦτο πεποιήκασιν αἱ μέλισσαι τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς ‹τοῦ θεοῦ› ἐκ τῆς δρόσου τῶν ῥόδων τῆς ζωῆς καὶ πάντ‹ων› τῶν ἀνθέων τῶν ὄντων ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ. Διότι πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἐσθίουσι καὶ πάντες οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πάντες οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ ὑψίστου, ὅτι κηρίον ζωῆς ἐστι τοῦτο καὶ πᾶς, ὃς ἂν φάγῃ ἐξ αὐτοῦ, οὐκ ἀποθανεῖται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον.

[51] *Somn.*, 2. 255.

[52] *Ex.*, 7. 20-21.

(ἐν δὲ ἀπαιδεύτῳ λόγῳ) when they are not supported by sound reason.[53] In the novel, when the queen-bees start building a honeycomb on Aseneth's lips, they illustrate the means to convey speech or the seal to keep silence. The scene confirms the significance of the honeycomb as the divine λόγος, reason and word of God in the Jewish-Hellenistic thought which borrowed philosophical categories from the Hellenic schools.

> And all the bees covered Aseneth from her feet to her head. And all the bees were big and uncommon like their queens; and they arose from the break in the honeycomb and covered Aseneth's face and made on her mouth and on her lips a honeycomb similar to the honeycomb which was close to the man (from heaven). And all the bees were eating of that honeycomb which was on Aseneth's mouth.[54]

In the following paragraphs of the treatise *On Dreams*, Philo equates the river of Eden to the divine word (ὁ θεῖος λόγος) that descends 'from the fountain of wisdom' (ἀπὸ πηγῆς τῆς σοφίας) and waters the celestial, heavenly shoots and plants of the souls yearning for virtue; indeed, the four streams into which the river is divided stand for the four virtues.[55] Philo resorts to the testimony of the Psalms in support of his exegesis with references to 'the river of God… full of water' [56] which means that the Divine Word is full of the stream of wisdom, and to 'the strong current of the river', which 'makes glad the city of God'.[57] This city, Philo explains, is not the sacred Jerusalem on earth but the heavenly City; the verses require allegorical interpretation, meaning something different from what is plainly stated: 'Thus it is evident, that he (*sc.* the Psalmist) intends to convey something different (ἕτερόν τι) from the plain statement by means of the underlying sense/allegory

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[53] *Somn.*, 2.260.
[54] *J & A*, 16.19-20: καὶ περιεπλάκησαν πᾶσαι αἱ μέλισσαι ἐκείναι τῇ Ἀσενὲθ ἀπὸ ποδῶν ἕως κεφαλῆς. καὶ ἄλλαι μέλισσαι <ἦσαν> μεγάλαι καὶ ἐκλεκταὶ ὡς βασίλισσαι αὐτῶν· καὶ ἐξανέστησαν ἀπὸ τῆς πληγῆς τοῦ κηρίου καὶ περιεπλάκησαν περὶ τὸ πρόσωπον Ἀσενὲθ καὶ ἐποίησαν ἐπὶ τὸ στόματι αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ χείλη αὐτῆς κηρίον ὅμοιον τῷ κηρίῳ τῷ παρακειμένῳ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ. καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ μέλισσαι ἦστιον ἀπὸ τοῦ κηρίου τοῦ ὄντος ἐπὶ τὸ στόματι Ἀσενὲθ.
[55] *Somn.*, 2.242-243.
[56] *Psalm* 65 (64) 10.
[57] *Psalm* 46 (45) 4.

(δι'ὑπονοιῶν)'.[58] The heavenly city represents, in a figurative synecdoche, the cosmos or universe permeated by the overflow of the divine word as by the tide of a river. According to a figurative passage which is frequent in Philo that is, shifting from the macrocosm of the world to the microcosm of human beings, the city of God stands for the wise soul where God can walk and dwell. Significantly, the flow of wisdom is likened to a bowl of a mixed divine draught which causes inextinguishable happiness forever. In the metaphor, a most sacred cup is offered to the blessed soul, because it contains the soul's own reason and effects true gladness.[59]

The divine word is personified in the figure of the cup-bearer of God pouring a heavenly substance which is identified in the λόγος itself and defined by an enumeration of positive effects on the soul and ultimately is associated to a medicine, a φάρμακον. This symbolic imagery is somewhat analogous to the bread-cup-ointment metaphor which recurs in *J & A* and in particular the 'blessed cup of immortality, ποτήριον εὐλογημένον ἀθανασίας'[60], the 'cup of blessing, ποτήριον εὐλογίας' of God,[61] which is ultimately identified in the honeycomb with the other elements, bread and ointment. In fact, when the divine envoy gives Aseneth a piece of the honeycomb to eat, he confirms that she has just had 'bread of life, a drink of immortality and an ointment of incorruptibility'. The description of Aseneth's destiny resembles the Philonian imagery of plants and shoots to represent the soul flourishing in the word-wisdom of God. In addition, Aseneth becomes an immortal mother-city where human beings can find their place of refuge forever. Thus, the overall metaphor in this passage of *J & A* seems to signify that the rescuing word of God, of which the honeycomb is a symbol, is well received by Aseneth as the embodiment of the universal heavenly community as well as the wise man's soul.

> Here now you have eaten bread of life and have drunk a cup of immortality and have anointed yourself with an oil of incorruptibility. Here then from today your flesh will blossom like flowers of life from the land of the Most High and

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[58] *Somn.*, 2.246-247: ὡς δῆλον εἶναι, ὅτι τοῦ προφανοῦς ἕτερόν τι βούλεται δι'ὑπονοιῶν παραστῆσαι. My translation attempts to indicate that Philo is using the term *hyponoia* in the sense of allegory.
[59] *Somn.*, 2.249.
[60] *J & A*, 8.5.
[61] *J & A*, 8.9.

> your bones will flourish like the produce of the garden of delight of God; and unshattered strengths will embrace you and your youth will not see old age and your beauty will not wane forever. And you will be like a mother-city which has been built to protect all those who seek refuge in the name of the Lord… [62]

Thus, the novel of *J & A* contains a symbolic imagery hinting at significant concepts. These concepts receive only a partial explanation in dialogues and speeches, remaining encoded in enigmatic descriptions and gestures. As we have seen, the motif of silence assumes different values in the texts explored. Dio of Prusa interprets the figure of silence in Homer as a rhetorical device which the poet used to add semantic depth to the story of the Trojan War; the Oration 61 clarifies the notion of the 'Homeric silence', presenting an apparently quiet and submissive Chryseïs as influential over the events, so that she may embody the concept of authorial silence itself. The interpretation of biblical verses in Philo of Alexandria's treatises expands the scriptural material as if the word of God remained silent, requiring a mediator in order to be fully grasped. Reading the novel of *J & A* through Philo's intellectual exegesis proves to be fruitful for a better understanding of the symbolic imagery and the reinterpretation of biblical stories in literary testimonies of Hellenistic Judaism. Indeed, Philo offers useful allegorical material to decode the sophisticated underlying senses of *J & A*. Although in absence of references to the novel-tradition in Hellenistic testimonies it is not possible to secure a firm place for the story of Aseneth in Jewish literature, these points of contact might prove that early versions of *J & A* circulated at the time of Greek-speaking Judaism in the centuries at the turn of the era.

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[62] *J & A*, 16.16: »ἰδοὺ νῦν ἔφαγες ἄρτον ζωῆς καὶ ἔπιες ποτήριον ἀθανασίας καὶ κέχρισαι χρίσματι ἀφθαρσίας. ἰδοὺ δὴ ἀπὸ τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας αἱ σάρκες σου βρύουσιν ὡς ἄνθη ζωῆς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς τοῦ ὑψίστου καὶ τὰ ὀστᾶ σου πιανθήσονται ὡς αἱ κέρδοι τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς τοῦ θεοῦ· καὶ δυνάμεις ἀκάματοι περισχήσουσί σε καὶ ἡ νεότης σου γῆρας οὐκ ὄψεται καὶ τὸ κάλλος σου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα οὐκ ἐκλείψει. καὶ ἔσῃ ὡς μητρόπολις τετειχισμένη πάντων τῶν καταφευγόντων ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ…«

3.4 Interpretation and Symbols in *J & A* and Porphyry's on *The Cave of the Nymphs.*

The Bible represented for the Jews the authoritative text, foundation of the culture and traditions of Israel that is, a literary source bearing significance akin to Homer in the Hellenic world. As Stanley has remarked, although Graeco-Roman culture lacks a sacred normative text analogous to what Scripture represented for Jews and Christians, the Homeric epics can be defined through characteristics typical of the Bible. In this interpretation, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are 'primordial texts', the basis of the society which saw their rise as the development of a complex literary culture. It is noteworthy that fundamental texts are loaded with educative value by their readers throughout subsequent ages. This value is rendered by means of ethical examples which are conceived as engraved in the collective memory of the society transmitting them.[63] In this connection, Homer can be defined as the 'Bible' of the Greeks.[64] The present section focuses on the Neoplatonic philosophers' doctrines and in particular on Porphyry's reading of select verses of the *Odyssey* describing the cave of the nymphs at Phorkys, the harbour of Ithaka, Ulysses' fatherland. Drawing on the work of Numenius the second century philosopher, Porphyry interprets allegorically the Homeric description of the cave conflating in it Plato's philosophical myths of the Cave and of Er. These texts are in my opinion relevant to a better understanding of symbols and allegorical imagery in *J & A*, a narrative in between the ancient novel and a biblical commentary that contains embedded philosophical-religious senses.

A significant point of contact between interpretative readings of Homer and of the Bible is the attempt undertaken by subsequent readers to add further senses to cultural texts, in tune with the needs of their time. As we have seen in Chapter 1, Heraclitus the grammarian's declared aim was to rescue Homer from the charge of impiety which was moved against the literary fiction of the poems by the philosophers of the past, such as Plato, Epicurus and their aftermath.[65] The high

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[63]Stanley (1990) esp. 51-52 on parallel aspects between Biblical and Homeric texts.
[64]E. g. Buffière (1956) 10; Griffiths (1967) 79.
[65] Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems*, 4: Plato banished Homer from the utopian city envisioned in the *Republic*, however philosophers borrowed their doctrines from Homer himself; see e. g. Russell-Konstan (2005) xix-xxi.

moral value of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are to be demonstrated through allegorical readings of Homeric episodes, in which gods and heroes become representations of physical-natural events, human activities, thoughts and feelings of the human soul. Beyond the apologetic purpose, however, Heraclitus aimed to assert the high educational value of Homer as the foundation stone of Hellenic *paideia*. In much the same way, Hellenistic Jewish writers intended to promote their culture as the most ancient source of knowledge. Pagan authors developed parallel accounts of their praiseworthy origins and the unsurpassed value of their ancient lore.

Both pagan and Jewish Hellenistic authors recognized wisdom as a possession of alien cultures from time immemorial. Numenius of Apamea, a philosopher active in the second half of the second century, ascribed ancient lore to the Brahmans, Jews, Egyptians and Magi; these peoples were able to produce knowledge in the spirit of Plato, so that it is necessary to resort to their wisdom going back to them (ἀναχωρήσασθαι), as well as to Pythagoras' teachings.[66] It is thus noteworthy from this testimony that Numenius was acquainted with Eastern cultures and that he was interpreting their lore through Platonic philosophy. Numenius' thought is known to us through Plotinus, his pupil Porphyry in the *Life of Pythagoras* and the *Cave of the Nymphs*, and the Church Fathers Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Eusebius of Cesarea. His conceptions of the highest being, of the world soul and human soul and the latter's fall into matter in the generation process influenced early Christian theology, providing the terminology for the development of its concepts. However the Christian Fathers, such as Eusebius, presented Numenius as a precursor of the Christian thought, emphasizing his knowledge of Scripture yet without providing their readers with precise information about the sources which Numenius used. A more general acquaintance with the holy books of the Jews and Moses, the wise lawgiver whom Numenius knew under the variant name of Museus, is thus more plausible, as also Galen and Longinus, the author of the treatise on *The Sublime*, refer to the account of Creation and to the lawgiver of the Jews.[67] For his use of Platonic terminology, Numenius was an intermediary between Philo of Alexandria and

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[66] Numenius, Fr. 1 Des Places.

[67] See Edwards (1990a) 68: the definition of Plato as an 'Atticizing Moses' may thus be not original to Numenius; references to Genesis and the Lawgiver of the Jews in Galen, *de usu partium* XI.14; Longinus, *De sublimitate* 9.9.

Plotinus. Numenius' well known definition of Plato as none but 'a Moses speaking in good Attic Greek', Τί γάρ ἐστι Πλάτων ἢ Μωσῆς ἀττικίζων;[68] although it may have been reformulated by the Christian authors who transmitted it, can be used to summarize the position of cultural eclecticism which is assumed by Hellenistic intellectuals. As my literary analysis hopes to demonstrate, parallels between the allegorical discourse of *J & A* and pagan philosophical thought may be traced back to Numenius. However, I shall focus on Porphyry's on *The Cave of the Nymphs* because of the analogies in the imagery between the Homeric commentary and the novel, which seem to disclose a shared cultural background.

If we turn to a closer analysis of the texts, we shall notice points of contact between *J & A* and Porphyry's allegorical commentary on *The Cave of the Nymphs*. From the few verses of the *Odyssey*[69] describing the sacred grotto of the Nymphs in the harbour of Phorkys, when Ulysses comes back to Ithaca, the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry of Tyre constructs a rich commentary on Homer and ancient wisdom, with learned details about philosophical and religious concepts. The terminology at the *incipit* of the treatise is significant: the eleven verses of *Odyssey* XIII are quoted as the example of Homer's poetic technique, which is as complex as a riddle.[70] Indeed Mark Edwards has argued that Porphyry's commentary is not only meant to be a work of interpretation on Homer, but also a handbook for interpreters, and implicitly a 'reprimand' for those intellectuals who purported to attain the truth without acknowledging the necessity of previous achievements.[71] In fact, Porphyry's authorial voice points out from the beginning that the description of the hallowed space is not merely Homer's poetic fiction, or the faithful rendering of a geographical place.[72] Thus, Homer speaks the truth, conveying profound senses by means of

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[68] Numenius, Fr. 8 Des Places.
[69] *Odyssey*, 13.102-112.
[70] Porph., *On the Cave of the Nymphs (de antro Nympharum)* 1: Ὅτι ποτὲ Ὁμήρῳ αἰνίττεται τὸ ἐν Ἰθάκῃ ἄντρον, ὃ διὰ τῶν ἐπῶν τούτων διαγράφει λέγων…
[71] Edwards (1996) 89. The other leading argument of Edwards' article is the presence of features in *On the Cave of the Nymphs* which may be a polemic against the Gnostics, following in the footsteps of Plotinus' *Enneads* 2.9.
[72] § 4. τοιούτων ἀσαφειῶν πλήρους ὄντος τοῦ διηγήματος πλᾶσμα μὲν ὡς ἔτυχεν εἰς ψυχαγωγίαν πεποιημένον μὴ εἶναι, ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἱστορίας τοπικῆς περιήγησιν ἔχειν, ἀλληγορεῖν δέ τι δι' αὐτοῦ τὸν ποιητήν, προσθέντα μυστικῶς καὶ ἐλαίας φυτὸν πλησίον. 'As the narration is full of these obscurities, it is not the case of a poetic fiction (πλᾶσμα) that was

allegory. In my opinion, Porphyry's on *The Cave of the Nymphs* provides a useful model to discuss the literary genre of *J & A*. While the purposes of *J & A* are concealed 'between the lines', like Porphyry's possible polemics against the Gnostics,[73] the novel purports to retell the true version of Joseph's story in Egypt, thus expanding on a limited portion of the biblical text. Moreover, symbolic elements in Porphyry's treatise seem to have parallels in the descriptions of the setting, objects and colours-materials in *J & A*. These points of contact in the use of allegorical imagery suggest that *J & A* was conceived as a commentary on Scripture.

While selecting a few verses of the *Odyssey* for his commentary, Porphyry creates an original literary-philosophical context for the passage. Elements of the landscape are described as symbolic in the treatise: the grotto of the Nymphs, which is a natural cavity in the rocks near the harbour of Phorkys, the springs of ever-living water flowing from the cave, and the olive tree near the grotto. The Nymphs are semi-divine creatures called Naiades, who preside over springs and streams of water; they work on stone-looms, weaving purple mantles, and collect the honey of the bees in amphorae also made of stone. A mystical image concludes the Homeric passage, as the cave of the Nymphs opens in two doors: the one oriented towards Borea, the North, is the descending path of mortal men, while the one oriented towards the South or Notus is the way for the ascent of immortal beings. Quoting the authority of the philosophers Pherecydes of Syros and Numenius of Apamea, [74] Porphyry interprets the description of the cave as a significant myth loaded with ethical and epistemological values. The Platonic myths of the Cave and of Er, the Pamphylian soldier who came back to life to recount what he saw in the world beyond, are

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composed as it came along to bewitch the spirit of the reader, nor was it the record of a geographical place, but the poet writes an allegory in it, adding mystically nearby also an olive tree.'

[73] Following in his master Plotinus' footsteps, Porphyry criticized in the Gnostic thought especially the conception of an evil Demiurge, creator of the inferior universe of matter; a typical Gnostic myth is recounted in the *Apocryphon of John*, as we have seen: a female spirit and emanation of the Father, Sophia, presumes to be self-sufficient and in her desire to be equal to God she conceives the monstrous Yaldabaoth, demiurge of the world. Porphyry entitled Plotinus' Enneads 2.9 'Against the Gnostics' or, 'Against those who say that the Demiurge and his universe are evil'. See Edwards (1996) 89.

[74] See Edwards (1990b). Pherecydes of Syros is cited as an authority both in Numenius, Fr. 37 Des Places and in the archetype of Porphyry's *Cave of the Nymphs*. Pherecydes of Syros' cosmology presents features that are developed in Porphyry's allegory that is, the Cave, the gates, the descent of souls. A Cave of the Nymphs is also mentioned in the fragmentary testimonies that are preserved under the name of a Pherecydes of Athens, in Jacoby (1923).

combined so that the Homeric cave is read as an allegory for the journey of the human soul through generation into matter and its return to the spiritual dimension.[75] Ulysses appears in Er's account as the example of a soul which decided to exchange the previous life of prestige and power for an anonymous, private one.[76] Following in Numenius' steps, Porphyry merges Plato's philosophical myth with the Homeric return of Ulysses to his fatherland.

In *J & A* descriptive elements and *realia* recall the interpretation of symbols in Porphyry's allegorical reading of Ulysses' return to Phorkys, the haven of his beloved Ithaca. As it will be explained throughout the present analysis, materials and colours in *J & A* include the stone of the walls of Heliopolis and the purple fabrics in Aseneth's rooms and as part of Joseph's clothes. As in the Homeric grotto, doors and passageways of Heliopolis are loaded with further significance. In fact, Joseph enters solemnly the gates of the sacred city while all strangers are left outside;[77] the heavenly messenger, as noticed in Aseneth's amazed words, manages to enter her high tower even though the door was firmly shut. The inside space of Aseneth's rooms recalls the theme of the maze which is exploited by Porphyry towards the conclusion of the commentary. In addition, the novel specifies for every room and window of Aseneth's tower the direction towards one of the four cardinal points;[78] in order to justify the orientation of the two doors in the cave of the Nymphs, Porphyry has to explain why North and South are preferred to the East and West, the latter representing the rise and fall of the sun, the reason why temples and sacred spaces are usually built with their entrance towards the East. In this symbolic picture, the olive tree near the harbour of Ithaca recalls the light, as the green and whitish leaves of the tree turn towards the sun in summer and reflect its beams. *J & A* features a

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[75] Both myths are part of Plato's *Republic*, in the books VII and X.

[76] *Rep.* 620 c-d. See Halliwell (2007) 447: Odysseus' rejection of the 'love of honour' (φιλοτιμία) recalls both a philosophical concept and the Homeric characterization of the hero, weary of the war and longing to return home.

[77] *J & A*, 5. 2-4. καὶ ἔφυγεν Ἀσενέθ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτῆς, ὡς ἤκουσε τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα λεγόντων περὶ Ἰωσήφ, καὶ ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὑπερῷον καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν θάλαμον αὐτῆς καὶ ἔστη πρὸς τὴν θυρίδα τὴν μεγάλην τὴν βλέπουσαν κατὰ ἀνατολὰς τοῦ ἰδεῖν τὸν Ἰωσὴφ εἰσερχόμενον εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῆς. (…) καὶ ἠνοίχθησαν αἱ πύλαι τῆς αὐλῆς αἱ βλέπουσαι κατὰ ἀνατολάς.

[78] Only the West is not explicitly mentioned, but it is recalled with the description of the four sides of the walls of Heliopolis that surround the city.

solar imagery besides the symbolic opposition of light and darkness. In fact, Joseph arrives to Heliopolis at midday;[79] his golden crown is made of twelve solar rays, and the branch of olive he is holding in his right hand may hint at the Hellenic values of the olive tree other than being the symbol of peace of biblical memory.[80]

As already noted, the imagery of *J & A* is characterized by opposite elements: darkness and light, death and life, error and truth. In much the same way, Porphyry uses contrasting or ambivalent symbols in order to explain the allegory embedded in the cave of the Nymphs. Thus, stone and rocks are associated to spring waters because the inert matter comes to life in a humid, dark environment; with a clever combination of biblical references and possible hints at pagan wisdom, the courtyard of Heliopolis is surrounded by majestic walls and crossed by the streams flowing from a 'spring of living water'.[81] In Porphyry's commentary the water nymphs attending on the looms in the cave work like priestesses devoted to the incessant process of generation: while mortal and immortal beings pass through the doors of the cave, they weave purple mantles, illustrating the forces of life. The nymphs' work is represented by the bees laying honey in stone amphorae; in a mutual exchange of roles, the nymphs find their counterpart in the pious, chaste bees, while the bees themselves act like priestesses.

The miracle of the honeycomb and bees which is described in *J & A* contains similar devices: as a confirmatory prodigious event, the episode reiterates Aseneth's mystical transformation. The emblematic role of the bees in *J & A* seems however more complex and ambiguous than in the *Cave of the Nymphs*. Possibly representing

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[79] *J & A*, 3.2: ὥρα μεσημβρίας. Joseph sends twelve messengers to speak on his behalf to Pentephres, asking for hospitality.

[80] *Gen.* 6.9-9.17: when the rain of the flood ceased, Noah sent ravens and doves outside the arc to test if there were any dry land; the second dove returns with an olive leaf in its beak, which becomes a symbol of peace because God will establish a new covenant with Noah, promising not to curse the earth any more.

[81] *J & A,* 2.10-12: And there was a large court surrounding the house, and a wall around the court, very high, built from big square stones. (…) And handsome trees of all sorts and all bearing fruit were planted within the court along the wall. And their fruit was ripe, for it was the time of harvest. And there was in the court, on the right hand, a spring of abundant living water, and below the spring was a big cistern receiving the water of that spring. From there a river ran right through the court and watered all the trees of that court. καὶ ἦν ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ ἐκ δεξιῶν πηγὴ ὕδατος πλουσίου ζῶντος καὶ ὑποκάτωθεν τῆς πηγῆς ἦν ληνὸς μεγάλη δεχομένη τὸ ὕδωρ τῆς πηγῆς ἐκείνης. ἔνθα ἐπορεύετο ποταμὸς διὰ μέσης τῆς αὐλῆς καὶ ἐπότιζε πάντα τὰ δένδρα τῆς αὐλῆς ἐκείνης.

priestly-royal figures in the Jewish tradition, the uncommon bees wear the colours evocative of the Temple and of the High Priest's robe, and with their crowns and stings they show their power and potential ability to harm. The connection between Aseneth and the bees is made clear when they cover the heroine completely and start building a new honeycomb on her lips. Aseneth-bee can be seen as a representation from a Jewish perspective of the Artemis of Ephesos;[82] this interpretation may explain Aseneth's self-representation as the 'virgin and queen',[83] before her transformation in a mother of Israel and in a mystical City of Refuge. Moreover, the analogy between the nymphs, brides and bees is exposed by Porphyry. In the allegorical picture the nymphs called Naiades, attending to spring waters and the humid substance, are the keepers of generation and stand for the souls which descend into being. In order to recall this mystical truth, brides (νύμφαι) are interspersed with spring water, as if they were bound to the generation process.[84] However, as Porphyry argues, the stone amphorae contain honeycombs rather than water; bees lay their honey, a substance which theologians recognize as having the power to purify and to preserve (καθαρτικῆς ἐστι δυνάμεως καὶ συντηρητικῆς).[85] In initiatory rites to Mithra, when the initiate has access to the grade of the Lion, his hands are cleaned with honey instead of water as honey is connected to fire and its cathartic function; in addition, honey has the power to purify the tongue from error and guilt.

In the Hellenic tradition, honey is a divine substance fallen from heaven and associated with nectar and ambrosia, food of the gods which grants immortality and incorruptibility to mortal beings; honey is also related to divine inspiration, thus it appears in traditions about the extraordinary birth of poets and philosophers. In the Jewish-Christian tradition, honey becomes a means to revelation, this following the reading of scriptural verses.[86] Hints at these complex values of honey seem to be contained in the *J & A* imagery. In fact, a piece of the honeycomb is offered to

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[82] I treat analogies between Aseneth and the Artemis of Ephesos more extensively in Chapter 1. See also Thomas (1995) for a study of the figure of Artemis in the literary imagination of the high Roman Empire, for instance in the Greek novels of Xenophon Ephesius and Achilles Tatius.
[83] *J & A*, 12.5.
[84] Porphyry, *de antr.*, 12.
[85] *De antr.*, 15.
[86] E.g. *Isaiah,* 7.14-15. I follow text and the rich comment by Laura Simonini. See Simonini (1986) 157-159.

Aseneth to eat after her seven days of ritual mourning and confession; Aseneth states in her final monologue that her mouth has become 'as dry as a parchment, her tongue as hard as a wax tablet and her lips like a potsherd';[87] It is noteworthy that Aseneth's organs of speech are compared to writing materials as if, with a shift from the literal to the allegorical sense, the honey assumed the metaphorical function to 'sweeten' Aseneth's speech, conferring new inspiration and wisdom to her words. In the miracle, the fire arising eventually from the table and consuming the honeycomb may evoke the fiery nature of honey in the Hellenic mythical-philosophical tradition. Thus *J & A* seems to invent allegorical scenery drawing on both the Classical and the Jewish-Christian lore.

Starting from the description of the inside and outside setting of *J & A*, it is possible to detect further hints at its philosophical-religious wisdom. In fact, the tower where Aseneth lives as a maiden illustrates the heroine's sheltered life. The features of the tower signify mystical-religious notions embedded in fiction. Thus, the ten rooms of Aseneth's apartments constitute a magical number, composed by the three rooms for the heroine and the seven ones for her seven maidens. The purple and variegated stones that constellate the first spacious room as well as the roof made of gold may signify a tribute to holiness, as if Aseneth's house were a temple, originally pagan, however preluding to a dedication to the Most High God. A gradual consecration of the space will be completed with the arrival of the man from heaven and the miracle of the honeycomb and multicoloured bees.[88]

> Καὶ ἐπάνω τοῦ πύργου ἐκείνου ἦν ὑπερῷον ἔχον θαλάμους δέκα. καὶ ἦν ὁ πρῶτος θάλαμος μέγας καὶ εὐπρεπὴς λίθοις πορφυροῖς κατεστρωμένος καὶ οἱ τοῖχοι αὐτοῦ λίθοις ποικίλοις καὶ τιμίοις πεπλακωμένοι καὶ ἦν ἡ ὀροφὴ τοῦ θαλάμου ἐκείνου ὅλ‹η› χρυσῆ.[89]

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[87] *J & A*, 13.9: καὶ τὸ στόμα μου γέγονε ξερὸν ὡς τύμπανον καὶ ἡ γλῶσσά μου ὡς κέρας καὶ τὰ χείλη μου ὡς ὄσρτακον.

[88] In his commentary to the passage, Philonenko identified points of contact with the descriptions of Psyche's palace and Venus' golden room in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* . Philonenko (1968) 133, nn. to 2.3 and 2.4. Cf. indeed Apuleius, 5.1.5: 'Enimvero pavimenta ipsa lapide pretioso caesim deminuto in varia picturae genera discriminantur' ; 5.1.6 and 5.29.1. In the wider literary-cultural picture, both *J & A* and Apuleius hint at mystery religion in fiction.

[89] *J & A*, 2.1-2.

The following descriptive passage from *J & A* contains more explicit hints at a religious dimension. Indeed, Aseneth's 'ornament' (κόσμος) represents her social status while also becoming 'πᾶς ὁ κόσμος τῆς παρθενίας αὐτῆς', thus indicating moral qualities, the virtue of Aseneth's virginity, which will be equalled to Joseph's male virginity. Moreover, as κόσμος can mean both 'ornament' and the system of the earth, the moon, the sun, the planets and the stars according to ancient cosmological notions, the space is loaded with religious significance. The sacred dimension permeating Aseneth's tower seems to be confirmed with the presence of a 'treasure' (ταμιεῖον). The word in its plural form indicates the treasures that were preserved in temples. Both κόσμος and ταμιεῖον are qualified with the adjective πᾶς, as the treasure is composed by 'all the goods of the earth'. Thus, Aseneth's house transcends the boundaries of a contingent space, becoming a veritable microcosm, a miniature image of the universe. Accordingly, the seven maidens who attend upon Aseneth were mystically born on the same day as their mistress, and while they are beautiful like stars, they might indeed represent the seven stars or planets of a cosmological system.

> Καὶ ἦν ὁ δεύτερος θάλαμος ἔχων τὰς θήκας τοῦ κόσμου τῆς Ἀσενέθ· καὶ ἦν χρυσὸς πολὺς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἄργυρος καὶ ἱματισμὸς χρυσοϋφὴς καὶ λίθοι ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πολυτελεῖς καὶ ὀθόναι ἐπίσημοι καὶ πᾶς ὁ κόσμος τῆς παρθενίας αὐτῆς. Καὶ ἦν ὁ τρίτος θάλαμος ταμιεῖον τῆς Ἀσενέθ καὶ ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ πάντα τὰ ἀγαθὰ τῆς γῆς. Καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἑπτὰ θαλάμους εἶχον ἑπτὰ παρθένοι μία ἑκάστη ἕνα θάλαμον κεκτημένη· καὶ αὗται ἦσαν διακονοῦσαι τῇ Ἀσενέθ καὶ ἦσαν πᾶσαι ὁμήλικαι ‹αὐτῆς› ἐν μιᾷ νυκτὶ γεγενημέναι σὺν τῇ Ἀσενέθ· καὶ ἦσαν καλαὶ σφόδρα ὡς τὰ ἄστρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἀνὴρ οὐχ ὡμίλει αὐταῖς οὐδὲ παιδίον ἄρρεν.[90]

Philonenko contrasted to the depiction of precious objects in *J & A* passages from Philo of Alexandria's books on dreams, in which the Jewish philosopher criticizes excessive showing of lavishness. Consider for instance the rhetorical question: 'Why do we build men's and women's apartments with golden ceilings? Is it not owing to

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[90] *J & A*, 2.4-6.

vainglory?'[91] However, the three colours and corresponding fabrics in Aseneth's room are the same as Joseph's attributes, which resemble the man from heaven's traits and the swarm of mystical bees. Interesting is the stress on the 'weaving', evident in the fabrics 'interwoven with gold' (χρυσοϋφὴς).

> Καὶ ἦσαν θυρίδες τρεῖς τῷ θαλάμῳ τῷ μεγάλῳ τῆς Ἀσενέθ, ὅπου ἡ παρθενία αὐτῆς ἐτρέφετο· καὶ ἦν μία θυρὶς ἡ πρώτη μεγάλη σφόδρα ἀποβλέπουσα ἐπὶ τὴν αὐλὴν εἰς ἀνατολὰς καὶ ἡ δευτέρα ἦν ἀποβλέπουσα εἰς μεσεμβρίαν καὶ ἡ τρίτη ἦν ἀποβλέπουσα εἰς βορρᾶν εἰς τὸ ἄμφοδον τῶν παραπορευομένων. καὶ ἦν κλίνη χρυσῆ ἑστῶσα ἐν τῷ θαλάμῳ ‹πρὸς› τὴν ‹θυρίδα τὴν› ἀποβλέπουσα‹ν› εἰς ἀνατολὰς· καὶ ἦν ἡ κλίνη ἐστρωμένη στρωμν‹ὰς› πορφυρᾶ χρυσοϋφὴς ἐξ ὑακίνθου καὶ πορφύρας καὶ βύσσου καθυφασμένη. καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ κλίνῃ ἐκάθευδεν Ἀσενέθ μόνη καὶ ἀνὴρ ἢ γυνὴ οὐδέποτε ἐκάθισεν ἐπ' αὐτῆ.[92]

An exegetical passage from Philo explains philosophically the variety of Nature as the result of a unique weaving activity. Divine Creation is a piece of interwoven texture: 'the world (κόσμος) is an all-variegated piece of embroidery (παμποικίλον ὕφασμα)'.[93] Significantly, the authorial voice remarks that the 'art of variegation' needs not to be restricted to 'weavers' (ὑφάνταις), although both the art itself and its very name must be regarded in awe. The enigmatic metaphor that seems to be built into the image can find a parallel interpretation in *J & A*, if descriptive elements of the inside space are read as symbols of cosmological imagery. As the earthly symbols of the divine are contained in the Jewish Temple and reflected on the robe of the High Priest,[94] colours and materials in the novel hint at the transcendent dimension. In a way similar to the Homeric cave of the Nymphs according to philosophical interpretation, Aseneth's house may be an image of the cosmos. In addition, as Inowlocki has noticed, Aseneth can be compared to

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[91] *Som.*, 2.55: τί δὲ χρυσορόφους ἀνδρῶνας καὶ γυναικωνίτιδας κατασκευάζομεν; ἆρ' οὐ διὰ τὴν κενὴν δόξαν;
[92] *J & A*, 2.7-9.
[93] *On Dreams* (*Somn.*) 1.202.
[94] For descriptions of the Temple, in particular its holy enclosures and gates, made of bronze, silver and gold, see Josephus, *Jewish War*, V.5; the Ephod, or High Priest's ceremonial dress, was made of threads 'of blue and purple, of scarlet, and twined fine linen', and embroidered in gold thread, according to *Exodus*, 28.4; *Leviticus*, 8.

Penelope, Odysseus' faithful wife, and a parallel to Penelope's renowned weaving can be identified in the bees' activity. Indeed, Penelope weaves on the loom a shroud promised to her father-in-law, Laertes, as a vow to her faraway husband, delaying her marriage to one of the suitors. The motif might be referenced in the honeycomb which the bees lay on Aseneth's lips, as to seal her eternal vow to Joseph and the God of Israel.[95]

In the *Cave of the Nymphs*, Porphyry states that the allegorical significance of the nymphs' weaving on stone looms is clear. The imagery itself is however a wonder (θαῦμα) not only to see, but also to hear, so that nobody would take it as a matter of fact. In the following passage, materials and colours are highlighted with the purpose of introducing the exegesis of the elements. Indeed, as Porphyry explains more extensively throughout the commentary, the stone is symbol of human generation. The myth shows it with Deucalion and Pyrra throwing stones on the way behind them to sew the seeds of the next generation after the flood.[96] Likewise, purple mantles represent human life, evoking the colour of blood and the tissues surrounding the bones, of which stone is a symbolic analogue; moreover, the purple comes from the sea, image of primordial matter and the humid environment where birth takes place. The cave itself is humid and dark, so that the passage of mortal and immortal souls through generation is depicted as a crossing from darkness to light. It is noteworthy that Porphyry inserts a subtle Homeric quotation in the expression ἰδέσθαι θαῦμα, which is the inversion of the typical formula θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι, with the addition of the variant ἀκοῦσαι. *J & A* reiterates the concept of θαῦμα in the use of the verb θαμβέω when the extraordinary beauty of a character is described, without realistic details, but through the response of amazement on the viewers' part.[97]

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[95] Inowlocki (2002) 40-42.

[96] See e.g. Apollodorus, 1.7.2; Ovid, *Met.*, 1.253-415; Pyndar, *Olymp.*, 9.45.

[97] *J & A*, 21.4: Pharaoh is astonished at the sight of Aseneth, ἐθαμβήθη ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει αὐτῆς; *J & A*, 18.10: Aseneth is astonished seeing her own transformed appearance reflected in the water, καὶ ἰδοῦσα Ἀσενὲθ εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἐθαμβήθη ἐπὶ τῇ ὁράσει; *J & A*, 19.4: Aseneth's beauty produces the same effect of amazement on Joseph, ἰδὼν αὐτὴν ἐθαμβήθη ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει αὐτῆς; *J & A*, 22.8: Aseneth is struck at the sight of Jacob's divine appearance in his old age, ἰδοῦσα δὲ αὐτὸν Ἀσενὲθ ἐθαμβήθη ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει αὐτοῦ.

> But this is less unclear: the fact that the Nymphs weave purple mantles on the stone looms, is not only a wonder to see, but also to hear. Who indeed could believe that the goddesses weave purple mantles in a dark cave on stone looms, hearing then to say that the divine fabrics and purple mantles are also visible?
> καὶ τοῦτο μὲν ἧττον ἀσαφές· τὸ δ' ἐν τοῖς λιθίνοις ἱστοῖς τούτοις τὰς νύμφας ὑφαίνειν ἁλιπόρφυρα φάρη, οὐκ ἰδέσθαι θαῦμα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀκοῦσαι. Τίς γὰρ ἂν πιστεύσαι θεὰς ἁλιπόρφυρα ἱμάτια ὑφαίνειν ‹ἐν› σκοτεινῷ ἄντρῳ ἐπὶ λιθίνων ἱστῶν, καὶ ταῦτα ὁρατὰ φάσκοντος εἶναι ἀκούων τὰ θεῶν ὑφάσματα καὶ ἁλουργῆ;[98]

In *J & A*, divine creation is not only evoked in speeches and prayers, but also depicted in the ritual of repentance which Aseneth undertakes during her seven days of prayer, fasting and mourning. Aseneth transforms the appearance of her precious room covering the floor with ashes, which blend with her tears and form a mud, 'like on a large road'; the Greek name designating the substance, πηλός, is the same term for the tide of the Nile, which was provoked by Isis' tears according to the myth.[99] Aseneth's sacred role will be confirmed during the son of Pharaoh's ambush; the heroine rescues Dan and Gad telling them to hide in the 'thicket of reeds' (ὕλη τοῦ καλάμου), literally a natural place, a marsh where hiding is easy, but on a deeper level of reading Aseneth's hallowed domain as she becomes the embodiment of mystical transformation and change of heart.[100] Porphyry recalls the authority of the ancients (οἱ παλαιοὶ) to explain the analogy cave-universe (κόσμος): cavities were dedicated to the κόσμος as they illustrate the matter (ὕλη), composing the earth within the universe.

> The ancients dedicated appropriately indeed caves and dens to the κόσμος, which they considered either as a whole or in its parts, making the earth the symbol of matter of which the κόσμος is constituted…
> Ἄντρα μὲν δὴ ἐπιεικῶς οἱ παλαιοὶ καὶ σπήλαια τῷ κόσμῳ καθιέρουν καθ' ὅλον τε αὐτὸν καὶ κατὰ μέρη λαμβάνοντες, σύμβολον μὲν τῆς ὕλης ἐξ ἧς ὁ κόσμος τὴν γῆν παραδιδόντες…[101]

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[98] Porph., *de antr.*, 3. The original title is περὶ τοῦ ἐν Ὀδυσσείᾳ τῶν Νυμφῶν ἄντρου; the treatise was edited by Nauck (1886). I follow text and the Italian translation by Simonini (1986).
[99] *J & A*, 10.16: Καὶ ἀνέστη Ἀσενὲθ τὸ πρωΐ καὶ εἶδε καὶ ἰδοὺ πηλὸς πολὺς ἐκ τῶν δακρύων αὐτῆς καὶ ἐκ τῆς τέφρας εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος.
[100] *J & A*, 28.7-8.
[101] Porph., *de antr.*, 5.

A confirmation of the allegorical senses embedded in the description of Aseneth's richly decorated rooms may be seen in Porphyry's invented etymology of κόσμος from διακόσμησις, 'what is adorned and set in order'. From the contrast between darkness and light, primordial matter and sophisticated forms, life springs into earth and returns to the transcendent realm.

> On account of matter therefore the κόσμος is obscure and dark, but on account of the interweaving forms and ornament, from which it was called κόσμος, is beautiful and pleasant.
> διὰ μὲν οὖν τὴν ὕλην ἠεροειδὲς καὶ σκοτεινὸς ὁ κόσμος, διὰ δὲ τὴν τοῦ εἴδους συμπλοκὴν καὶ διακόσμησιν, ἀφ' οὗ καὶ κόσμος ἐκλήθη, καλός τε ἐστι καὶ ἐπέραστος.[102]

Porphyry continues his philosophical-allegorical exegesis with further considerations on the origins of the world. Recalling the authority of Eubulos, an author who lived between the first century B.C. and the first century A.D., and is mentioned elsewhere only in Porhyry's *De abstinentia*,[103] Porphyry depicts Near Eastern religion and myth. The cult of Mithras originated in the Iranian plateau and was appropriated with adaptations in Hellenic culture. As a solar divinity, Mithras was associated with Helios-Apollo; according to the myth, the god slays a bull, which became one of his sacred images. In this connection, as Edwards argued, at some point in Hellenic-Near Eastern religious tradition Mithras was also identified with Hermes as the 'cattle-stealing god', the divine protector of theft, sudden finding and mischievous deeds, able to defer his pursuers by making the herd walk backwards. A rich tradition connected bulls with the birth of bees, pure and chaste insects swarming out of the decomposing body of the bull.[104] The following excerpt from the *Cave of the Nymphs* mentions Mithras' activity as the δημιουργός or creator of the universe; the cave with flowers and springs of water is the image on earth of the cosmic and heavenly order. This image supports the interpretation of *J &*

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[102] *De antr.*, 6.
[103] *De abst.* 4.16.
[104] Edwards (1993).

A as an allegory illustrating God's creation of a kingdom on earth which reflects the transcendent realm.

> Eubulos testifies that Zoroaster was the first to dedicate a natural cavity, full of flowers and springs, to honour Mithras, the maker and father of all, in the mountains near Persia; according to him the cave bore the image of the universe, which Mithras created, and the things in the cave at regular intervals were symbols of the cosmic elements and of the regions of heaven. [105]

In the novel, characters embody religious elements allegorically. Aseneth's transformation is prefigured in the man from heaven's speech in terms of an interconnection between sacred landscape and the woman's body. Aseneth is portrayed as a promised land forever, while time and space become indefinite and her role as a city of refuge for humanity is potentially universal. Aseneth's bones illustrate re-generation while they might be a subtle reference to Joseph's bones, in Jewish exegesis symbol of the people of Israel returning from Egypt to the Promised Land, like Moses brought Joseph's remains back to the native Shechem.

> Behold from today your body will bolt like flowers of life from the land of the Most High and your bones will be fertilized like the crops of the paradise of delight of God and unceasing strengths will surround you and your youth will not see old age and your beauty will not fade away forever. And you will be like a walled mother-city for all who seek a refuge in the name of the Lord God.[106]

In concluding this necessarily succint comparison between Porphyry's allegorical commentary on *The Cave of the Nymphs* and the novel of *J & A* supports the cultural significance which the hypothetical Jewish-Hellenistic narrative assumed diachronically. In a Hellenistic literary-philosophical context, *J & A* could thus signify the mystical journey and transformation of the soul in the transcendent

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[105] Πρώτου μὲν, ὡς ἔφη Εὔβουλος, Ζωροάστρου αὐτοφυὲς σπήλαιον ἐν τοῖς πλησίον ὄρεσι τῆς Περσίδος ἀνθηρὸν καὶ πηγὰς ἔχον ἀνιερώσαντος εἰς τιμὴν τοῦ πάντων ποιητοῦ καὶ πατρὸς Μίθρου, εἰκόνα φέροντος αὐτῷ τοῦ σπηλαίου τοῦ κόσμου, ὃν ὁ Μίθρας ἐδημιούργησε, τῶν δ' ἐντὸς κατὰ συμμέτρους ἀποστάσεις σύμβολα φερόντων τῶν κοσμικῶν στοικείων καὶ κλιμάτων…

[106] *J & A*, 16.16: ἰδοὺ δὴ ἀπὸ τῆς σήμερον αἱ σάρκες σου βρύουσιν ὡς ἄνθη ζωῆς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς τοῦ ὑψίστου καὶ τὰ ὀστὰ σου πιανθήσονται ὡς αἱ κέρδοι τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ δυνάμεις ἀκάματοι περισκήσουσί σε καὶ ἡ νεότης σου γῆρας οὐκ ὄψεται καὶ τὸ κάλλος σου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα οὐκ ἐκλείψει. καὶ ἔσῃ ὡς μητρόπολις τετειχισμένη πάντων τῶν καταφευγόντων ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ.

universe. The imagery of the novel contains symbols such as the honeycomb and bees, which could be understood both as part of the Jewish-Christian cultural baggage and in the context of a pagan system of thought. Indeed, as I have hopefully demonstrated, Aseneth as a City of Refuge is linked to the miracle of the honeycomb and bees and is described in allegorical terms like the 'good lands' of biblical memory that 'flow with milk and honey'.[107] Thus, as Homer for Porphyry left a universe of symbols to decode, so for the author(s) of *J & A* the biblical tradition was the recipient of images loaded with religious values significant in the contemporary time.

3.5 Philip the Philosopher on *Charicleia* and the Virtues of Allegorical Readings.

With the name of 'Philip the Philosopher' we spot the 'secular' identity of 'a Sicilian cleric who became Theophanes, Archbishop of Rossano in Calabria, in the first half of the twelfth century'.[108] Theophanes wrote *Homilies* that have been recognised as the work of Philagathos of Cerami, so that all the three names seem to indicate the same author. A thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Aithiopika* from Reggio Calabria contains the 'interpretation (ἑρμήνευμα) of 'Charicleia the virtuous' from the voice (ἐκ φονῆς) of Philip the Philosopher', as the *inscriptio* of the manuscript states. The author might have composed the allegorical interpretation of Heliodorus' novel before undertaking his pastoral role or he might have chosen significantly his 'secular' name to be connected to the reading of an erotic novel, albeit the novel is reinterpreted in edifying Christian perspective. The literary context of the treatise is particularly significant: the interpretation is prompted by two friends' request: as a lover of the *Charicleia* (ἐγὼ δὲ Χαρικλείας ὢν ἐραστὴς… ll. 16-17),[109] Philip's interlocutor cannot bear the chaste virgin to be slandered by men of letters (φιλόλογοι) unable to grasp the true sense of the story.[110] It is feasible that

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[107] E.g. *Exod.*, 33.1-3; *Lev.*, 20.24; *Deut.*, 6.18. See Hubbard (1997) 104.
[108] See Hunter (2008) 829-832.
[109] I follow the text that is revised in Bianchi (2006), and is based on Aristide Colonna's edition of Philagathos' ἑρμηνεία in appendix to the text of Heliodorus' *Aithiopika* as *testimonium* XIII: *Heliodori Aethiopica*, A. Colonna recensuit, Romae 1938, pp. 365-370.
[110] Philagathos may imply with subtle polemics that the study of letters without the deeper philosophical-allegorical interpretation that penetrates the surface of the literal sense leads to superficial and even mistaken understanding.

analogous aims promoted the writing of the *J & A* Christian versions: Aseneth's story had to be preserved and read in the correct interpretation. However, the only testimony to later allegorical readings of Aseneth's book is the letter to Moses of Inghila,[111] which serves as a preface to the Syriac version of the novel.[112] In the Greek texts of *J & A*, and in particular in the longer versions, interpretative comments are embedded in the narrative as additions that highlight religious concepts, often by way of repetition.[113]

Philip the philosopher's authorial persona pronounces a literary protest before undertaking the task: he feels too old and insensitive to love (ἀνέραστον γέροντα) to deal with erotic tales (ἐρωτικὰ διηγήματα), but after all he admits that illustrious predecessors in wisdom and philosophy testify that 'παίζει καὶ πολία, τὰ δὲ παίγνια σεμνά', 'the old play too, but it is serious playing'.[114] Thus, Philip agrees that 'we play seriously with the novel and, leaving aside for a little while philosophical speculation, we may well turn to an erotic palinode', φέρε καὶ ἡμεῖς σεμνῶς τῷ πλάσματι παίξωμεν καὶ τῆς φιλοσόφου συννοίας ἐκστάντες

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[111] Aggel or Inghila, today Eğil, North-East of Diyarbakir.

[112] The Syriac version of *J & A* is incorporated in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* by Zachariah Rhetor, a world-chronicle that was meant to be a continuation from the history of the Church by Socrates and Theodoret, and was accomplished after 568-569 A.D. Zachariah, the author, is only known as a monophysite and monk, who wrote perhaps in Amida (Diyarbakir). The Syriac version offers an important *terminus ante quem* for the date of the Greek novel of *J & A*. In fact, the preface to *J & A* in Zachariah Rhetor's work is featured as a letter of request for the translation and one of reply that justify the work itself. In the first letter an anonymous author writes to a certain Moses that in the Episcopal library of Resch 'Aina or perhaps of Berea (Aleppo) in Syria, he found a small and very old book that was written in Greek and titled *Book of Āsyath*. The anonymous writer states that he could read its story (ἱστορία), yet without being able to grasp its allegory (θεωρία), because Greek is for him a foreign language.

[113] E. g. Aseneth's *Psalm* at *J & A*, 21.11-21 is a hymn featuring the repetition of the verb ἥμαρτον, 'I have sinned', which is both a literary strategy conveying the idea of a ritual and the use of the same narrative material, which made Philonenko think of a later addition, a re-working of the extant original novel. See Philonenko (1968) 7-11: hypothetical additions to the original shorter *J & A* are Aseneth's silent prayer, which follows her confession to God, the second entry of Aseneth's tutor and his remarks on the heroine's initially humbled appearance, which subsequently undergoes a transformation, the dialogue between Joseph and Aseneth when Joseph returns to Heliopolis, and the patriarch Jacob's portrayal.

[114] For the source and possible references of this sentence, see Bianchi (2006) 14-15, n. 20. The σοφός in question as the author of the wise thought may be originally Plato, as conceptual parallels can be found in *Leg.* III.685a and *Leg.* VI.769a. Closer lexical correspondence can be detected in a fictitious epistolary exchange between Libanius and Basilius and especially in a letter by Nicetas Magister (IX-X sec.), who was however unlikely the model for Philagathos' commentary. Bianchi concludes that the expression must have become a popular *gnome* and a *modus dicendi* in the Byzantine world.

μικρὸν πρὸς παλινῳδίαν τραπῶμεν ἐρωτικήν (ll. 35-37). The commentary itself is however a form of intellectual-philosophical interpretation. The depth of the treatise is in fact marked by learned quotations while Philip, φιλόσοφος and διδάσκαλος, explicitly compares his dialogue in apology of the *Charicleia* to the Platonic *Phaedrus* so that Philip becomes 'novello Socrate', to say it with Nunzio Bianchi.[115] The narrative framework of the treatise and the opening itself are closely reminiscent of the pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Axiochus*, in which Socrates is asked by his friends to visit and comfort the seriously ill Axiochus.

Indeed, Philip's rhetorical dilemma between refraining from treating erotic matters and applying philosophical exegesis to them is featured as a passage from Socrates' paradigmatic teaching. Adding scriptural authority to Socratic lore, Philip quotes a verse from the *Song of Songs* in support of the statement that love suits young souls: διὰ τοῦτο νεάνιδες ἠγαπησάν σε, 'that's why young women love you', as if only the young could appropriately 'find room for the arrows of love' (ὡς μόνης τῆς τοιαύτης ἡλικίας χωρούσης τὰ ἐρωτικὰ ὀϊστεύματα ll. 32-33). On the other hand, Philip continues, in the dialogue *Phaedrus* about love and the human soul Socrates instructs and amuses young and handsome Phaedrus with 'erotic tales' (ἐψυχαγώγει τὸν νέον ἐρωτικὰ διηγήματα, ll. 40-41). The reference to the *Song of Songs* which is defined as a 'mystical canticle' is significant and hints at an underlying conception of love as a spiritual entity. Hunter has in fact compared Philip's arguments with the prologue of Origen's *Commentary to the Song of Songs*, in which people unable to infer the correct profound interpretation of the canticle are compared to children, being young and simple intellectually, as they will accept the words literally, the way they are presented. To these readers, the *Song* will not bring either good or harm; but should the poem fall in the hands of those who take spiritual love for a material passion and a physical desire, the sense of its poetry will be distorted. For this reason, both Jews and Christians seemed to restrict the access to the *Song of Songs* to those who had come to a certain age and were reputed to be wise enough to understand the spiritual message of Scripture.[116] In much the

[115] Bianchi (2006) 16-17.
[116] Hunter (2008) 837-838.

same way, the book of Charicleia is compared by Philip to Circe's brew (κιρκαίῳ κυκεῶνι, l.47), a polyvalent φάρμακον, with the power to reveal either the beastly nature of the unlearned or the superior wisdom of those possessing, like Ulysses, the ability to discern ethical and spiritual virtue.

If the book of Charicleia is educative, itself 'teacher of ethical philosophy' (παιδαγωγικὴ γὰρ ἡ βίβλος καὶ ἠθικῆς φιλοσοφίας διδάσκαλος, ll. 50-51), it also blends 'the water of the story with the wine of the allegorical interpretation' (τῷ τῆς ἱστορίας ὕδατι τὸν οἶνον τῆς θεωρίας κεράσασα, ll. 51-52). While maintaining the metaphor of the useful drink, which is connected to the symbolic image of Circe's potion and to the concept of a 'sober libation',[117] Philip uses the keywords ἱστορία and θεωρία, designating the complementary notions of the literal sense of the narrative and its figurative or speculative exegesis. The same Greek words are used in the prefatory letter to the Syriac version of the book of Aseneth, when an anonymous epistolary interlocutor asks Moses of Aggel to disclose the deeper sense of the old little book.[118] The statement of methodology remarks that an allegorical sense was originally embedded in the novel itself. Allegorical senses that

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[117] Philip summarises the allegorical sense of the novel after he has exhorted the reader to consider the value of the enigmatic text: σύνει ὅτι σοι λέγει τὸ αἴνιγμα. ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ τῆς ὑλικῆς δυάδος ὑπέρτερος γένηται, τότε ὁ ἔξωθεν ἡμῖν προσγινόμενος τῆς θεολογίας νοῦς καὶ πρὸς θέαν τοῦ γένους ἀνάγων τὴν ψυχὴν, ὁρᾶται αὐτῇ χαριέστατος, δεχόμενος μὲν τὴν τοῦ πόθου λαμπάδα{ν}, ἐνιεὶς δὲ αὐτῇ τὸν ἔρωτα τῆς ὑψηλῆς ἐπιγνώσεως· ὑφ' οὗ πλησθεῖσα καὶ μέθην μεθυσθεῖσα τὴν σώφρονα καὶ γεγονυῖα, ὡς εἰπεῖν, ἐρωτόληπτος καταφρονεῖ μὲν συνήθων, ἀλογεῖ δὲ τοῦ σώματος, πρὸς μόνον δὲ τὸ φιλούμενον συννεύει, τὸ φρόνημα. (ll. 139-147), transl. by Lamberton (1986): 'Understand what this riddle is saying to you! When the soul transcends the material dyad, she catches sight of the mind that lies outside of us and that approaches the knowledge of the divine. This leads her upward to the contemplation of her true family and seems lovely to her, and takes up the torch of desire, injecting into her the love of the highest wisdom. Filled with this love and drunk with a sober drunkenness-carried away, so to speak, by love- she scorns her former habits, utterly unmindful of her body, and her thought tends only toward her beloved.'

[118] Brooks (1924), 12-13: '… librum quondam parvum inveni antiquissimum, qui vocatur liber Āsyath, graeca [lingua] conscriptum; et ἱστορίαν tantum eius legi, et θεωρίαν non intellexi.' On the basis of the prefatory letter the Syriac version of *J & A* can be dated at the end of the sixth century A.D. If the authorship of the *Charicleia*'s exegesis is recognised as by the hand of Philip the Philosopher, the Christian reading of Heliodorus' pagan novel is obviously much later. However, it is interesting to notice that in the lively poly-cultural environment of Late Antique Christian Syria so early an interpretation of a novel already existed and circulated; the use of the same words to indicate the process of the significant reading of a narrative may point out that the literary text of Aseneth was indeed conceived as an erotic novel which contained an edifying message for the elevation of its readers.

were consciously inserted by the novelist can be detected in the *Aithiopika*, as Most and Hunter have clarified.[119] In fact, Heliodorus' novel is shot through with enigmatic scenes, objects loaded with symbolic, magical value, revelatory dreams and significant names. While allegory can be defined as an extended metaphor that is, a metaphor in narrative, and a dynamic figure that involves a substitution of objects and their meaning, the characters of the *Aithiopika* undertake journeys, being exiled from their native land and returning home or finding the end of their life faraway. Indeed, the positive characters in the novel embody the progress of wisdom: the wise and canny Calasiris, Charicleia's foster-father, departs from his native Delphi, the fatherland of Hellenic wisdom, and dwells in Egypt, the land which he recognises as the cradle of culture, which saw Homer's birth, and is yet inferior to the primordial wisdom of Ethiopia. Heliodorus' novel may thus represent in fiction the Neoplatonic philosophical concept of the original emanation of everything from the One and the eventual return to it. Rather than illustrating a specific religious system, such as mystery cults, as Merkelbach surmised, the *Aithoipika* may be constructed on the blueprint of the broader philosophical conception. On the simple narrative plane, the good find ultimately their reward, whereas the bad are punished. Thus, Philip the Philosopher picked up the moralising orientation of the novel, highlighting the value of the characters as *exempla* of virtue or vice.

In Philip's commentary, Charicleia is a model of virtues, thus representing a rare exception in her gender, as the author remarks, following both the early Christian tradition and the ancient Greek misogynist trend. Numerology and etymology support the value which is attributed to characters: the different that is, not repeated letters in the name Charicleia, if counted according to their numeric value, add up to the number 777, symbol of perfection, as it is 'mystical, virgin and sacred among the numbers': ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ὁ ἕβδομος ἀριθμὸς μυστικὸς ἐστι καὶ παρθένος καὶ σεπτὸς ἐν τοῖς ἀριθμοῖς (ll.115-117). As Nunzio Bianchi has remarked, Philo of Alexandria has also connected the number seven to the concepts

[119] See Most (2007) and Hunter (2008).

of reverence and dignity in the treatise on *The Creation of the World*.[120] According to Philo, the number seven mirrors the heavenly spheres and the musical notes, the vowels and even the human senses and movements;[121] it is symbol of holiness and reverence. The fact that Philip the Philosopher connects it to virginity may be paralleled to the seven virgins at the service of Aseneth in the novel of *J & A*; they were born on the same night as Aseneth and are beautiful like stars, so that they may represent a cosmological order.[122] In Philip's interpretation, Charicleia illustrates the soul and 'the mind that adorns it' (Χαρίκλεια σύμβολόν ἐστι ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ ταύτην κοσμοῦντος νοός, ll. 109-110) which is lead by Calasiris 'in calm' (ἀκύμονα) through 'the salt and the waves of life' (τῶν βιωτικῶν κυμάτων).[123] Calasiris embodies the 'practical life', is the one who brings up Charicleia[124] whereas the heroine as a figure of theoretical/contemplative life can be associated in the Christian thought to the character of Mary the sister of Marta and Lazarus in the Gospel of Luke.[125] Philo had already allegorized patriarchal figures in universal terms as types of the human soul, qualifying Jacob as the life striving to acquire wisdom with continuous practice. The simile of the soul or human life which is led like a ship through the sea towards a safe haven is also used by the Jewish exegete; Isaac, embodiment of divine joy and of the nature able to learn without effort or practice, also finds his figurative counterpart in the sunshine and calmness over the sea (γαλήνη).[126]

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[120] Philo, *opif.*, 127: 'On these grounds I hold that those who originally fitted names to things, being wise men, called this number "seven" because of the "reverence" (σεβασμός) which it deserves, and the heavenly "dignity" (σεμνότης) pertaining to it. The Romans, who add the letter σ left out by the Greeks, make this appear still more clearly, since they, with greater accuracy, call the number *septem*, owing to its derivation, as I have said, from σεμνός (reverend) and σεβασμός ("reverence").'

[121] See *leg. All.* 1.12-13.

[122] *J & A*, 2.6: … καὶ ἦσαν πᾶσαι ὁμήλικαι ἐν μιᾷ νυκτὶ γεγενημέναι σὺν τῇ Ἀσενέθ· καὶ ἦσαν καλαὶ σφόδρα ὡς τὰ ἄστρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ…

[123] See the analysis of the passages in Hunter (2008) 840.

[124] καὶ Χαρικλῆς ταύτην τρέφει, ὁ πρακτικὸς βίος, διδάσκων αὐτὴν ὀϊστεύειν τὰ πάθη καὶ τῆς ἀνδρείας καὶ σωφροσύνης ὡς Ἀρτέμιδος εἶναι θεράπαιναν… (ll. 129-132), 'And Charicles rises her, being the practical life, teaching her to shoot the passions and to become a servant of courage and temperance, like Artemis…'

[125] Luke 10.38-42.

[126] E.g. Philo, *Abr.* 207: 'For the Father did not suffer the whole course of the human race to move amid grieves and pains and burdens which admit no remedy, but mixed with them something of the better nature and judged it well that the soul should at times dwell in sunshine and calm…(εὐδιάσαι

Thus Charicleia, a virgin accustomed to shoot arrows against irrational passions like the goddess Artemis in moralising interpretation, can be compared to the proud maiden Aseneth at the outset of *J & A*. Two passages describing the heroine in Philagathos' interpretation support the underlying allegorical senses of the Jewish-Christian story of Aseneth. Before clarifying that Charicleia is a hypostasis of the soul, the commentator merges deftly a metaphorical image designating the process of his own exegesis and the significance of the clothes which the heroine wears in order to protect her identity and life. In fact, as the ethical sense of the story is enshrined within its metaphorical gates, thus needing the work of exegesis, similarly the holy chiton that Charicleia wears under a cloak will be eventually shown, revealing her supernatural beauty which reflects her spiritual value.

> οὕτω μὲν εἴσω τῶν τῆς ἱστορίας πυλῶν ἡμᾶς ὁ λόγος εἰσήγαγε τὸ ἦθος κοσμῶν καὶ τὴν λαμπρὰν ἀμπεχόνην τῆς κόρης διάρας, ἣν διὰ τοὺς ἐπιβουλεύον[τας ἠμ]φιάσατο τὸν ἔνδοθεν ἱερὸν χιτῶνα ὑπέδειξε. καιρὸς δὲ ἤδη καὶ τοῦτον ἀναπετάσαι καὶ ἀκραιφνὲς τὸ κάλλος ἐνδείξασθαι (ll. 104-109)
> Thus our discussion has led us within the gates of the story as we have articulated its capacity for moral instruction, and lifted off the maiden's resplendent robe (in which she had been clothed on account of those who contrive against her), revealing the holy chiton beneath. Now it is time for this (work) as well to take wings and for her beauty to be revealed without intermediary![127]

Dresses and ornaments seem to be loaded with deeper significance in *J & A*; especially Aseneth changes her clothes throughout the narrative according to her status and the progress in her change of heart. It has been remarked that at the beginning of the novel Aseneth's appearance recalls that of a pagan idol or the mythical Pandora of the Hellenic tradition, from Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days* to later elaborations of the myth.[128] Aseneth wears precious clothes, a veil and a

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καὶ γαληνιάσαι ποτὲ τὴν ψυχὴν δικαιώσας)'. Philo also connects peace and serenity to the number seven, which corresponds to the *Sabbath*, the day of rest, for the Jews, and requires silence and the solitude appropriate for the wise; cf. *Abr.* 30: 'But the seventh faculty is that of the dominant mind, which, after triumphing over the six and returning victorious through its superior strength, welcomes solitude and rejoices in its own society, feeling that it needs no other and is completely sufficient for itself, and then released from the cares and concerns of mortal kind gladly accepts a life of calmness and serenity (βίον εὔδιον καὶ γαληνὸν ἀσπάζεται)'.

[127] Transl. Lamberton (1986) 309.

[128] Hes., *Th.*, 570; *Op.*, 60-105.

tiara, objects similar to the gifts which Pandora receives from the gods; however from the beginning of the novel she appears like a bride to her rejoicing parents, this element anticipating her destiny to become Joseph's spouse. The heroine's festive clothes will be changed for a black tunic of mourning, which Aseneth wears during her seven days of fasting and prayer; the man from heaven will exhort her to put on her best clothes again, but to remove the veil from her head, because on that day and forever, her intellectual faculties equal those of a man; the veil, symbol of a boundary in communication and gender, is thus removed because limits can be overcome. Like Charicleia, Aseneth shines eventually with the dazzling beauty that mirrors her moral virtues.[129] Aseneth's inner transformation will be reflected in her appearance, while it is repeatedly configured in the story as a mystical passage from darkness to light. In his prayer of blessing, Joseph asks in fact that she may partake of her own new creation; God is the One who gave life to everything (τὰ πάντα), calling everything from darkness to light, from error to truth and from death to life.[130] Philip the Philosopher uses an analogous image to give a particular interpretation of Charicleia's itinerary:

> Charicleia was born among the Ethiopians, for man comes forth out of the invisible as if out of darkness into the light (ἐκ τῶν ἀφανῶν γὰρ ὡς ἀπὸ σκότους εἰς φῶς), and proceeds to life in this world as she is taken to Greece. (ll. 127-128)

With these fascinating lines from Philip the Philosopher's interpretation of Heliodorus' novel I conclude the present journey throughout Jewish, Christian and pagan allegorical writings from Hellenism to the end of antiquity. Several questions remain open to further investigation about *J & A*: was it conceived as a Jewish allegorical novel before its Christian transmission, and to what extent was it related to the pagan romance? In my opinion, it is feasible to consider *J & A* as a hypothethical Jewish-Hellenistic narrative tradition, possibly circulating orally as a story related to Scripture that meant to offer a most significant, entertaining variation on the Joseph-story. Thus, Philip the Philosopher's treatise is most significant in

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[129] *J & A*, 18.9. In the long text, Aseneth's cheecks which are 'red like pastures interspersed with the blood of the son of man', and her 'lips like a rose of life come out of his sacred cup' sound like the attempt to clarify the meaning of allegorical imagery in the novel on the part of Christian scribes.
[130] *J & A*, 8.9.

analogy with *J & A*, in order to show that our novel may be read as a treatise composed as a fiction on the virtues of sublimated love and religion. Overall, allegorical imagery and religious symbols have made *J & A* a text suitable to be well received as an edifying story in Christianity.

3. 6 Conclusions: Significance of *Joseph and Aseneth* as an Allegorical Novel.

The present survey of literary texts has offered examples of the ways rhetorical figures such as allegory can serve intellectual purposes from Hellenism during the Roman Empire to the Middle Ages. The pagan texts which I have explored in comparison with *J & A* present different approaches to a shared view of the Hellenic cultural past. Philostratus' dialogue *Heroikos* aims to demonstrate in fiction that Homeric lore and myth are ever living and exert a powerful influence on the present time. It is therefore necessary to believe in the arcane truth conveyed by the ancient hero Protesilaos; thus the Phoenician sailor's pledge to believe in the vinedresser's account becomes a general tribute to loyalty towards the Hellenic heritage. As an author exposed to the increasing influence of Christianity, Philostratus seems to present an alternative system of beliefs, which is grounded on the authoritative Homeric source and on myth existing from time immemorial. Analogies in the allegorical imagery between the *Heroikos* and *J & A* suggest that the novel belonged in an intellectual Hellenistic context at some point of its early tradition, before being inherited in early Christian and monastic circles. In addition, provided that the early *J & A* was a Jewish text, its purposes in Hellenistic Jewish culture can be compared to Philostratus' ideology of remarking the unsurpassed value of the Hellenic lore.

Parallels between *J & A* and Dio of Prusa's *Oration 61* on the Homeric silence have pointed out especially the theme of silence as a condition complementary to speech in Aseneth's story as well as in Philo of Alexandria's treatises. Dio's figure of Chryseïs, the daughter of Apollo's priest in the first book of the *Iliad*, is paradigmatic of Homer's literary choice to leave the deeper reasons of the events narrated concealed 'between the lines' of the epics. Aseneth's pattern from inappropriate speech to monologues and soliloquies in her confession and to her ultimate universal role as a sacred mother-city depicts by means of allegory an exemplary 'change of heart', a notion which is both philosophical and religious in Hellenistic culture. In

fact, *J & A* was probably a novel written by a Hellenized Jew in the poly-cultural environment of Egypt and/or the East during the first centuries of the Common Era.

The philosophical content of *J & A* can be better grasped with a view of Neoplatonic philosophers' works in the second and third centuries A.D. Numenius of Apamea, the author alleged to be aquainted with the Septuagint, may constitute an earlier link between philosophical speculation and the *J & A* tradition. However, especially Porphyry's allegorical commentary on *The Cave of the Nymphs* is useful for its testimonies as well as for its explanations of symbols which recur in *J & A*, such as the bees, the honeycomb and the colours-materials of purple and stone. It is feasible that *J & A* combined biblical imagery with literary elements borrowed from Hellenic culture, inventing original senses for its unique blending of symbols. While Porphyry brings us to complex philosophical notions in Late Antiquity, which are useful to a better understanding of the religious sensibilities conveyed in *J & A*, Philip the Philosopher's allegorical interpretation of Heliodorus may appear as far-removed from both the Jewish Hellenistic and the early Christian tradition of *J & A*. Nevertheless, Philip's allegorical strategy is relevant to the aims of *J & A* in its hypothetical original contexts as well as in its subsequent literary-religious environments. Indeed, Philip shows that re-reading Heliodorus allegorically, thus adding Christian significance to a pagan erotic novel which was originally pregnant with allegorical senses, carries the merit to rediscover religious virtues and wisdom in ancient Greek literature. Christian copyists of *J & A* were likely to adopt analogous approaches to a Jewish-Hellenistic story which was not included in any official canon of Scripture, however it conveyed edifying values which could be highlighted by means of useful additions and repetition of key concepts.

Concluding Remarks

The present thesis adds to studies of Hellenism and the Roman Empire the analysis of a Jewish text which shares points of contact with Graeco-Roman literary works. Indeed, *J & A* is relevant to Classical studies as a testimony to the shared cultural background in the Hellenistic period. Jewish intellectuals such as Philo of Alexandria and the anonymous author of *J & A* expressed their outlook in a language which blends the Greek κοινή with literary-philosophical words as well as with the Septuagint, a source of hallowed lore and traditions constituting at the same time the vocabulary for the Jews of the Diaspora. The literary analysis of *J & A* has led me to propose that the educated authorship of this unique Jewish novel was able to mediate between different intellectual systems. As other Eastern cultures, the Jews adopted Hellenistic perspectives, reinterpreting literature and philosophy to convey complex interpretations of the Hebrew heritage and their present time.

The comparison between *J & A* and allegorical-salvationist texts such as the *Corpus Hermeticum* brings new material to the study of mystical-religious sensibilities in the Hellenistic era. As allegorical texts of pagan provenance, *J & A* questions the place of humankind in history and the cosmos, presenting in figurative imagery the way to salvation as the ethical choice of conversion, love of human beings and forgiveness as the response to evil and violence. The language of *J & A* illustrates creation and rebirth as a metaphor of the return to the highest deity and the absolute good. These tenets could be shared between pagan, Jewish and Christian outlooks in Hellenism and Late Antiquity, when philosophical systems such as Platonism and Stoicism promoted theological definitions of God for various religious groups.

Overall, this study of allegory as the key focus in the texts explored has hopefully addressed traditional questions about the novel of Joseph and Aseneth,

such as its provenance and date. In fact, the analysis of common themes, rhetorical figures and significant imagery in *J & A* and learned Hellenistic authors supports the origins of the narrative in an educated Hellenistic-Jewish environment. On the other hand, the later Christian tradition of *J & A* points to several readings and interpretations of the story in new religious perspectives. Therefore, *J & A* may testify to the appropriation of both the Jewish and the Graeco-Roman ideologies in the first centuries of Christianity. The complex culture of Hellenism was thus inherited in Christian outlook, conveying different beliefs while preserving the figurative language, notions and ideologies of Hellenistic Judaism.

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